

WARP AND WOOF:

OR, THE

REMINISCENCES OF DORIS FLETCHER.

BY HOLME LEE,

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TIDE," ETC.

"Quelque différence qui paraisse entre les fortunes, il y a une certaine compensation de biens et de maux qui les rend égales."—*Rochevoucauld*.

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WARP AND WOOF.

I.

ERLSTONE FOREST.

It was but a few days after Miss Pegge Burnell's strawberry gathering and Ursula's last breeze of temper, that Dr. Julius Eden called at our house to tell Connie and myself that if we were still in the same mind about going to Erlstone and would walk out there early in the day, so as to have plenty of time before us, he would bring us home in the afternoon; he should be driving over to Erlstone Castle to visit Earl Calcedon, and would meet us at four o'clock by the Wishing Well, which was one of the most popular attractions of the place. He made the proposal in the simplest way in the world, and mamma, thanking

him, said she was sure we should be much obliged to him—it was too long a distance for us to walk both ways—but was he sure we should be no inconvenience to him?

“Quite sure,” replied he; “there is room enough in my carriage for two girls in nutting costume, or one splendid matron; I am afraid, Miss Ursula, I cannot offer you a seat this time. I shall consider it a settled thing then, Miss Doris, that I meet you at four o’clock to-morrow afternoon by the Wishing Well. I appoint that spot because, though you do not know the geography of the forest, you are sure to be directed to the well by the woodman’s wife who lives at the gate.

And then he went away, being on his visiting round to his patients when he called, and Ursula, oblivious of her recent discomfiture, immediately began to animadvert with her usual severe dignity on the public impropriety of our engaging in any such adventure—she designated our proposed excursion an *adventure*. Papa was not present at the time, and she therefore had us at an advantage.

"It is not as if it were a picnic," said she; "*then* your returning in Dr. Julius Eden's carriage might have passed without remark; but for two young women to walk eight miles to stroll in a wood for an hour and be brought back by a gentleman whom they have only known a few months as a common acquaintance, is, I humbly submit, a trespass on the limits of conventional rules, which Redcross gossip will not be likely to overlook. I suppose you were taken by surprise, mamma, or you would never have given your consent to anything so conspicuously absurd?"

Mamma seemed rather dismayed at this view of the question, but she said, "No, Ursie, I only thought it kind in Dr. Julius to give your sisters the opportunity of going without over fatigue where he knew they wished to go. At Roseberry, how often did Dr. Maclean carry you all out across Whinmoor and drop you five or six miles off to walk home."

"That was quite different," replied Ursie; "Dr. Maclean was a Scotchman and so ugly we might have gone to the world's end with

him and not a tongue would have wagged against it."

"I am sure, Ursie, Dr. Maclean was the nicest man who ever came to Roseberry, and he was not ugly at all," cried Connie, firing up in defence of an old favourite. "It was only that he had red hair."

"And somebody else's hair may be red without his being ugly at all either," said Ursie, with irrelevant significance.

Connie coloured as if a passionate retort were burning at the tip of her tongue, but she contrived to swallow it down in indignant silence. Now, when any person did not wish to be very polite, he or she might have called Dr. Julius Eden's hair *red*, though why *red hair* should be an offensive term of description for anybody's natural thatch I cannot undertake to say. I can call to mind several well-disposed, even nobly-disposed individuals whose hair was fiery red; but Connie, to whom the colour of Dr. Julius Eden's locks ought to have been a matter of utter indifference, was so aggrieved by Ursie's insinuations that she at once retired from the

conflict, while Ursie laughed and appeared extremely well satisfied at the success of her little artifice. She threw a meaning glance in my direction, nodded her head twice or thrice in an oracular manner, and then closed the subject by saying with a peculiarly significant smile, "I can guess what I can guess."

The next morning when we were making ready for our walk to Erlstone, she came up to our room and said magnanimously that she hoped we should enjoy ourselves; it was going to be a very sultry day, and most likely there would be a thunder-storm before the end of it, but she supposed such commonplace hindrances as those would not detain us at home? She was right—they did not, and in spite of her sinister forebodings we set forth on our march in excellent spirits and condition.

After crossing the Old Grove Fields we skirted round by the priory plantations, and so up into the freshness and glory of the sunny downs, where the short grass was elastic as velvet to the foot, and the breeze came sweeping unchecked with health and vigour on its wings. Once on that

high level we paced cheerily forward for three miles or more, now looking over the sea where the white ships, gliding in and out of the shadows of clouds, sailed away, for aught we knew, to the world's farthest bounds ; then over the valley in which lay Scarcliffe, high perched above the waves upon its rocky throne, and Redcross nestled in its cup of evergreens between two gradual hills.

Connie was famous for short cuts 'cross country, and with Erlstone Forest in our view, we were able to make for it very directly ; thereby abbreviating our walk by two miles at least. But some parts of the way, though familiar to us by previous explorations, were not without their difficulties ; for when we reached that curve of the down in the hollow of which lay the cottage inhabited by Mr. Westmore and his mother, it became clear that our only way of descent into the broad vale of Erlstone would be through a hanging wood which clothed the almost precipitous inland slope of the down. Connie had achieved this descent on a previous occasion, but I had declined it ; it was now, however, imperative that

we should either get down here or retrace our steps for some distance, and Connie was quite against the latter alternative. We therefore skirted along the top of the wood until we came to a point where the long grass was much trampled, and where, on putting aside the slender boughs of a young tree, the roots of which were far below, we discerned a narrow path, very steep and very dangerous I thought; but Connie immediately spoke in its favour.

"All you have to do is to drop down here, Doris; catch hold of this branch as I shall do, and then slide after me. It is only sliding," she explained. "Boys make these paths bird-nesting. Watch me and see how I do it—if you fall you will fall soft; it is only bracken and leaf-mould down there." And suiting the action to the word, Connie grasped the bough she indicated and swung herself lightly into the gloom, whence, looking up, she cried, "You see it is quite easy, I am all safe. Come along."

Thus exhorted I committed myself to the branch, and was pleased and surprised to find that I landed on my feet unhurt excepting a slight

wrench to my shoulder, caused by not letting the bough go quickly enough. Then the sliding began, and I was fain to follow my leader, catching and clinging to whatever came within my reach.

"Is not this delightful?" demanded Connie, pausing on another brink, which must be conquered by another drop. I acceded, but not ecstatically, while she suddenly went out of sight over the edge of the ridge.

"This is worse than the other," I said, peering down upon her.

"Oh! it is nothing—boys get down it, and what boys can do girls can do," was the cheerful little answer—fruit of our brother Anthony's teaching, no doubt. I took the leap successfully by the help of another tough ash-bough, and then Connie assured me there was only one more fall, just a little deeper than the last, and then we should be in the great beechwood and out of it again directly. She proceeded with the liveliest agility, and I followed without any further remonstrance until we reached the lowest level, when she appealed to me if that scramble down a boy's path was not worth a bruise or two? I admitted

that, perhaps, it was, without mentioning that for my own personal comfort I preferred easier passages.

We had come out from the underwood upon a vista of magnificent trees which stretched along the base of the down. Looking up, the path by which we had scrambled from the ridge appeared even steeper than it had done from above, and as we continued our way, I noticed, by and by, that the natural shelves, covered with bracken, which had made the descent practicable, were broken away, and that a wall of grey, weather-worn cliff rose perpendicular and frowning from the level where we were walking, not twenty paces from the inner line of beeches which formed the ride. The sunshine was playing in and out amongst the ranks of giants, touching with fairy lustre the wild flowers thick sown upon the grass; deep moss was about their roots, and the path was soft with the decaying verdure of generations.

"I do love summer in the woods!" cried Connie with enthusiasm. "There are so many things to make us happy, don't you think so, Doris?"

I fear I smiled disappointingly like a person sadly experienced as I said, "Yes—if we had a mind tuned to enjoy them."

"Oh! don't, *don't* be philosophical in the face of all this sunshine and beauty! Look here and here, and listen to those birds: these things are enough for me, my heart dances with joy!" and Connie plucked a plume of ferns and then made me admire the dewy sparkles on a spider's web, deep in the shadow where the sun had not yet reached.

"I am glad of it, Connie; simple pleasures, not paid for by any creature's pain, are best," said I—perhaps I was feeling tired, or my shoulder ached with that jerk it had had in getting down the boy's path; for this was certainly not holiday talk, and Connie's reproachful glance intimated as much, though she made no reply to my observation. Why *would* people be didactic and moralizing instead of throwing themselves heartily into every little scheme of enjoyment? I know she thought. She did not begin to argue the matter, however, but only moderated her pace, now and then darting in amongst the trees for

the closer inspection of some object that caught her eye, and keeping time to her steps by many a cheerful burst of song. She had one of the sweetest voices in the world, my little sister, but these natural overflowings of youthful gaiety sank into silence when, at a bend in the wood path, we came in sight of three children of our acquaintance, who came from all this distance to Redcross school. One was a tiny girl who hopped along on her right foot, trailing the left behind with the aid of a pair of crutches, while her two brothers, each only a degree bigger than herself, kept patient pace with her on either hand. Every day these little creatures walked a mile to the cottage of a friendly butter-woman who went into Scarcliffe daily with her cart and dairy produce, left them at the school and picked them up on her return.

“Oh, Doris, what a blessing to have the free use of our limbs! Don't you feel for this poor wee thing?” Connie whispered compassionately, and as the children drew near, smiling fearless recognition at her, she went down on her knees to bring her own bonnie face on a level with the

little girl's, and putting an arm round the fragile body, asked if she were going to school, and if she liked it.

"Yes'm," was the lisping answer, and a wonderful expression of quiet delight came into the little cripple's great dark eyes as she looked at Connie and then at the sunshine on the grass. Connie gathered her a posy of wild flowers, and stuck them in the belt which bound her holland frock round the waist; while the boys stood by, grinning with pleasure to see their sister so much made of. When we parted from the pathetic group, Connie was for some minutes quite silent and subdued. Looking back presently we saw the children still standing in the sunshine watching us, and waving her hand in sign of good-bye, the trio turned and pursued their way.

"I am so fond of Jessie," Connie then said; "has she not a pretty, plaintive face?"

"Yes; could anything be done for her, I wonder?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure there might. You saw she had a laced stocking on her straight leg, for that is weak too; Miss Martha Maurice had it

made for her, and Mr. Peacocke, who recommended it, said that if she had some particular kind of frame for her body it might do her good; but there was a chance of its failing, and those surgical things are so expensive that it was never tried. It is only during the last year that she has begun to walk at all; before that, Miss Martha told me, she used to sit out in the porch by the hour together, and so often alone, with the most woeful look on her pale face; but she has learnt to read now, and is growing quite clever with her fingers. Her mother is dead, but her father is very fond of her, and her two brothers are quite her humble servants. She does not seem unhappy to you, does she?"

"Not at all."

"I am glad of that; it would be weariful work for me if I were like her. I am afraid I should wish myself out of the world if I could not enjoy it. It must be very mournful to be always sick and in pain or helpless."

"The back is made for the burden, Connie darling," said I.

"Or better—don't you remember that pro-

mise? 'As thy day is, so shall thy strength be. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms;' it is written in aunt Maria's Bible, in such a queer old-fashioned hand, with 'Godfrey Somers' below it. I wonder who Godfrey Somers was—nearly all aunt Maria's books were once his."

I could not enlighten her, and we walked on silently a little way; I being rather struck by this glimpse of serious feeling in my young sister. Doubtless she had true religious thoughts in her heart often, but we were not a family who ever made much talk about such matters—we were all more or less reserved—and perhaps that was the reason why we were always esteemed in Redcross quiet and well-meaning, but rather worldly people. I never could bring myself to adopt the phraseology of our pious friends, and the same feeling prevailed with the rest as with me, and in consequence we were believed, like Gallio, to care for none of those things, because on our lips they were not familiar. I have often wished that good people had a little more charity at the service of those whom they suppose to be still on the farther side

of the spiritual Rubicon ; but I will not prose on such grave subjects now.

When we emerged from the beechwood we entered on the lovely Erlstone valley, and directed our steps by beautiful field-paths, where the green corn on either hand was growing heavy in the ear. About a mile and a half distant rose the gray old towers of Erlstone Castle, and stretching behind it in a dark sinuous line against the horizon lay Erlstone Forest. We had certainly Queen's weather for our excursion, and as we had started early, we arrived at Erlston village before noon, when the sun was shining its brightest. But the heat was far from overpowering, and Connie declared it was the perfection of weather for a day in the woods. The village was a neat, well-cared for, well-to-do place, but we did not linger there: directed by a labourer going home to his dinner, we set off up a long lane which led to the forest, between fields that had been forest also less than half a generation ago—a lane ploughed into hopeless ruts, and impeded by great knotty roots of cut-down trees, that were sailing the seas over as planks of ships ;

for Erlstone was a royal forest of royal oaks, which had furnished royal British navies to rule the main for centuries.

"Miss Pegge Burnell says there used to be lilies in Erlstone Forest when she was a girl," Connie said; "but it is too late in the season to find any now, even if they still grow there. Lilies are my favourite flowers."

That led us into a discussion on the sentiment of flowers, which brought us to the lane end, a gate, and a woodman's cottage. A woman came out and gave us certain directions by which we might find the Erlstone and the Wishing Well, and then passing through the gate, we struck at once into a dusky glade which brought us, after several beautiful bends and windings, to an expanse of the grandest woodland scenery that had ever gladdened our eyes in all our lives.

"I should like to be a hermit and live here!" Connie exclaimed, as we reached a sunny clearing where a little brook babbled its way amongst white pebbles down a fern-fringed declivity, while the great trees stood aloof, slowly swaying their

upper boughs in the breeze, and adding a rustle of leaf music to the sweet water sounds.

By mutual consent we agreed to rest there and eat the dinner nurse Bradshaw had carefully packed for us in a little basket; there were abundance of natural seats remaining there from oaks departed, and a lovely landscape around to tempt us into a long hour's idleness, but after that we rose and continued our explorations, Connie proposing that we should now seek the Erlstone.

The Erlstone was a lofty crag at the source of the brook which half encircled our present retreat, traditionally endowed with a fairy power of procuring the fulfilment of all wishes wished under its dripping brink; and the well which received the spring was called the Wishing Well, from this fabled virtue.

Connie voluntarily announced her lack of faith in it, but she was eager to go, nevertheless, and I took leave to rally her, declaring I saw superstitious credulity in her eyes; for she was looking bright and excited as if in expectation of something wonderful. She, however, pouted a denial of the charge, and affirmed more steadfastly than

before that she was sure she could not be so silly as to believe in wishing wells or wishing stones or any such nonsense; only it was fun to go up to the Erlstone, because everybody who came to the forest went there, and because the grandest trees were grouped about that spot, as Miss Pegge Burnell had told her.

It was a very steep and rugged road we had to climb, more like a dry water-course, indeed, than a path; and even Connie, with all her agility, was fain more than once to call a halt and drop down to regain breath on the low mossy banks that enclosed it. But at last the Erlstone was reached, and we took a long draught from the cup hanging over the well to refresh ourselves. So high were we now standing that, though lofty trees engirt us on every side, we could see for miles over the surrounding country and the sea, and could recognize every prominent feature of the landscape; and so profound also was the woodland silence that the tinkle of each drop of water, as it fell from the brow of the Erlstone into the well below, was as distinctly timed as notes of music. This sound presently reminded Connie

of the fabled virtues of the spot, and she asked which of us was to wish first—would I? Obediently, therefore, I climbed the slippery stones, poised myself on the brink, holding on to the bushes by the crag, and tried to wish; but nothing would come into my mind, I could not think of anything to wish, so I stepped down again and lost my chance.

“That is not lucky!” cried Connie; “but it cannot be helped now. If you had wished for a new book it would have done,” and casting aside her hat she scrambled into my place, caught the drops on her brow, her lips and her hands, *wished*, and came down again triumphant.

“Ah! Miss Connie, you need not affirm any more that you lack faith!” cried the voice of Dr. Julius; “never yet went maiden to wishing-well fuller of pious credulity than you.”

We both turned round, startled at the unexpected interruption, for it still wanted two hours of the time appointed for his arrival at the trysting-place, and saw him coming up from a lower and easier road than that we had found, but one almost parallel with it. He must have

heard some of our talk as we climbed the rough cart-track, Connie's denial of her belief in wishing-wells and wishing-stones amongst the rest. He told us he had been enabled to drive out to the castle earlier than he anticipated, and having paid his visit to the earl, he was now at our service until we thought proper to go home.

"You must wish a wish before we leave the Erlstone," Connie said; "I have wished mine with great success."

"Indeed—tell me what you wished."

"Oh! I only wished to be happy and good and lucky."

"Only—well most likely you will," replied he, looking at her with a pleasant thoughtfulness.

Connie was wearing her loveliest air just then. Nothing could surpass the delicate fairness, polish and bloom of her face, heightened by two large blue-gray eyes, and framed in waved folds of ruddy brown hair. It was a face for a picture, a face for a fireside, a face for sunshiny days and rainy days—faithful, tender, true—but above all, it was a face for a lover to love.

I fancy that idea first occurred to Dr. Julius

Eden this very day in Erlstone Forest. But Connie was blissfully thoughtless, frank and heart-free; there was no shy, tremulous down-dropping of those pretty eyes, no breathless, tripping inconsistency in her silver speech. She looked at him and prattled with as much tranquillity as if he had been our grandfather. I was glad to see it—whatever thoughts had been suggested to her by Ursie's jealousy or Miss Theodora Bousfield's nonsense, had made no lasting impression, but had seemingly faded from her mind as a breath fades from a polished mirror.

After a few moments of half-absent contemplation Dr. Julius yielded to the rather imperative repetition of her command, and mounted the slippery stones, furling his fingers across the rippled surface of the well, touched his forehead and lips as tradition enjoined, and descended with a jubilant air, saying,—

“I shall have my wish too, Miss Connie, all the signs are propitious.”

Connie was inquisitive to know what boon he had craved of the Guardian Fairy of the Well, but he replied that he could not tell her.

"That is not fair; I told my wish," said she.

"But mine is a secret. I could by no means reveal it at present; some day, however, I will certainly tell you;" and with that assurance she was obliged to rest satisfied, for all her urgency and wily cross-examination could not elicit a word further, though Dr. Julius had an air of rather liking his catechization than not.

It was impossible not to see that there was a friendly intelligence between these two, which had grown up unconsciously. They *suit*ed somehow: the honourable man of experience and knowledge, and the girl of simplicity and natural, if uncultivated, gifts. I have not said much on the subject of Connie's mental capacity, but though she had not Ursula's determined and laborious cleverness, she had a bright mind of her own, quick perceptions, and generous, active powers of reflection and thought. Dr. Julius evidently liked her company, and appreciated the unopened treasures of fine sense, justice, and womanly humility, which her simple frankness of manner neither displayed nor yet concealed; they were there in store when wanted and asked for; and it seemed

to me, as I walked almost unnoticed beside them, that he was gently drawing her on to show him a little more of herself. But Connie had few views and fewer opinions at this date, and it ended by Dr. Julius himself talking out his instead, while she listened with a pretty air of interest which must have been felt as very encouraging, for his countenance wore an expression of perfect pleasantness and satisfaction as he led us by the most beautiful rides through the forest, pausing now and then to let us rest to admire the grouping of the magnificent trees, until we found ourselves approaching the gate by which we had entered it.

“In autumn or in early spring it is lovelier even than now,” said he, as we left the woodland behind and directed our steps to the village inn, where his carriage waited. “Summer foliage has an umbrageous beauty of its own, but give me the rich glow of September or the delicate vernal tints of May for Erlstone Forest.”

Connie told him that, perhaps, we might come again. Miss Pegge Burnell had promised a grand picnic there before the long warm days were

over, on which he said he hoped he should have leisure to be of the party.

When we reached the inn and the carriage was brought round, Connie and I were made to take the best places, while Dr. Julius sat opposite, with his back to the horses, and I could not help observing that there would have been plenty of room for Ursie, if he had not required a whole seat to himself. We had a rapid drive homewards, and just as we entered the Priory lane we met the butter-woman's cart with lame Jessie and her twin brothers packed in amongst the baskets. Jessie looked up at Connie with her wistful smile, and Dr. Julius inquired if the child was a small friend of hers.

"Yes; she is one of the class Mrs. Maurice gave to me at the school, and I do like her so much; she is such a good, affectionate little body!" Connie warmly replied. "I do wish something could be done for her."

I believe Dr. Julius thought somebody else was a good, affectionate little body too, but he had no time to say so, for the carriage suddenly pulled up at our garden-door, and he bade us

good-bye and drove on to Scarcliffe without getting out himself.

We were rather relieved to find only papa and mamma in the drawing-room to listen to our account of our pleasant day. Ursula had gone out to make a tour of ceremonious calls, a duty Connie and I evaded whenever we could, but which she performed with great assiduity. And to my surprise the only remark she felt it her duty to make afterwards was a repetition of the enigmatical one with which she had favoured us the day before,—“I can guess what I can guess;” to which she added on second thoughts, “Dr. Julius Eden is a far-sighted man—he knows what he is about,” a proposition which I could neither affirm nor deny, so I left it unanswered in all its native simplicity.

II.

D A W N.

WE did not see Dr. Julius Eden again for more than a week after our day at Erlstone Forest, but one afternoon Miss Martha Maurice came running in to beg Connie to put on her hat and walk down with her to the Scarcliffe Infirmary.

“Dr. Julius Eden has had lame little Jessie taken there,” she told us with lively satisfaction; “what put it into his head I don’t know, but if the poor little thing is to be set on her legs again he will compass it. Sir Cesar Wilde, the great surgeon, is staying at Dr. Eden’s for a day or two, and he has seen her. Make haste, Connie, we are to go and cheer her up whenever we can, for she frets at losing her brothers, which is only natural.”

Connie looked infinitely pleased, and was soon

ready to accompany Miss Martha. When they were gone, Ursula began to put on intelligent airs and to remark shrewdly,—“There will be vast opportunities for sentimentalism over that interesting little cripple. I repeat it, Dr. Julius Eden is a very far-sighted man and knows extremely well what he is about. If he had not discovered that Connie is fond of Jessie he would never have thought of making such a fuss about her; he could not have found a readier way to Connie’s heart than through her softness and pity for that child. Anybody with an ounce of sense can see his designs.”

“They are evident to no one but you, Ursie,” said I; “and I wish you would not indulge in such speculations.”

“Speculations! they are no speculations at all! I am as confident that Dr. Julius Eden proposes to himself to have our Connie for his wife, if he can get her, as if he had told me his intentions in so many words.”

“He goes very quietly and leisurely about it, then,” returned I.

“Because he has a mere girl to deal with,

and he is not sure of her. He will study her all round before he risks anything, and if he sees no chance of success he will draw back without committing either himself or her. He is thirty, she is not full seventeen, and might reasonably dream of being some young man's first love. Now she cannot be Dr. Julius's—he will never lose his head for any woman again, and though he may wish to marry Connie and would be civil enough to her if he did, he will never be as mad for her as he was for Miss Theodora Bousfield. Connie's brains are stuffed with romance, and if Charles Maurice could only have a fair start against Dr. Julius, I would back him to win the race any day—passion and enthusiasm against wisdom and skill have very long odds in affairs of the heart.”

I was not so sure of that as Ursula, but I only said,—

“I don't know where you have learnt all your theoretical knowledge, Ursie, but I hope you will display it nowhere save at home.”

“You unsuspicious goose!” cried she, laughing; do you think all the world is as slow as yourself?

Mrs. Peacocke and Miss Cranmer begin to make their sly allusions already; and ground enough too, I think, after that drive from Erlstone Forest."

"*Their* gossip counts for nothing; did they not make sly allusions also to Mr. Barstow and yourself?" said I.

Ursula grew very red as she replied: "If they did, it is very ill-natured in you to refer to it: who would be flattered at having her name coupled with that absurd little Fortuner's?"

"And who that has any true feminine delicacy would be flattered by having her name coupled with any gentleman's until he had conferred the right? Don't let us talk about it any more, Ursie—if we cannot help *thinking*, let us, at least, think to ourselves. I cannot endure premature discussions on these subjects, and pray, don't let Connie gain any inkling of what you have said to me."

"I should not be quite such a simpleton as to do *that*, though I don't profess to be so mighty particular as you. I suppose if it goes on, Connie will be allowed to share in all the bazaar gaieties just as if she were come out?"

"Ursie, be persuaded to believe that there is nothing going on," urged I.

"I won't be persuaded to believe anything so manifestly untrue, but I will be persuaded to keep my own counsel, if that will satisfy you. Dr. Julius is a very pleasant and popular man. Connie hears his virtues and graces extolled on every side; he is making his opportunities to see her whenever he can, and you will not pretend to tell me he does it, merely to pass the time without any ulterior views. Stuff and nonsense! a little petting one day and a little plaguing another will soon do Connie's business; she is not half a match for him! Ay, but I would lead him a dance, if I were in her shoes, were it only to avenge his airs of lordship and serene assurance; but she is too simple, and the game will be all in his own hands. Mark my words: those two will be engaged before the year is out."

"Then it will be time enough to talk about it at Christmas,—we are only in July now," said I; "if you do not want to make mischief, you will not gossip with any of our friends on

such a serious matter—think if it were to come to Dr. Julius's ears——”

“I am not going to say any more, so don't preach. I see he has an ally in you, and, therefore, I will never mention the subject again, though if sisters may not tell what they think to each other, with whom *can* they be confidential?”

“Ursie, I would a thousand times rather you were confidential with me than with any one out of doors, especially on these topics,” I replied, hastily, feeling that there was much reason in what she advanced.

“Then don't pull me up so shortly when I do speak to you. I see the train events are falling into, and though I have not changed my opinion as to the injudiciousness of bringing Connie forward so early, I shall do nothing to alter it, and, I suppose, now you are enlightened, all your prayers and good wishes will be for Dr. Julius's prosperity. Connie might have better luck, and she might have worse, so I shall neither meddle nor mar any more—things may take their chance for me.”

On one point Ursula had approached very near the truth. Since that day at Erlstone Forest I had allowed myself almost to hope that Dr. Julius and Connie might grow from their present liking and suitability into a warm love for each other. I think it was the dearest wish of my heart that Connie should be happy, and I fancied I saw in Dr. Julius those fine and generous traits which would assure to any woman whom he might make his wife a fulness of content, such as pervades the lives of very few.

And Connie had a great capacity for happiness; she was not born to dwell in the shade. Let her have light, and sunshine, and joy, and her character would develop into a ripe beauty as lovely as the beauty of her face.

Ursie, however, had given me something to consider over on the text of First Love which had not troubled me before. Was it right and fair that Dr. Julius, who had suffered that sweet insanity ten years ago, should now mate himself with the bloom of a life unsunned yet by the faintest glow of passion? Would it not be more judicious for experience to cast in its lot with

experience—Dr. Julius with Miss Cranmer, for instance? They were nearly of an age, both had known disappointment, and they stood, therefore, on even ground. Abstract justice, I found, had much to say in favour of such an alliance; but on the whole, had I been in Dr. Julius's place, I should have preferred Connie, and abstract justice might have gone about its business elsewhere.

I am growing an old woman now, and I may have my views on these matters. I have seen many marriages—some made in heaven, some in heaven's antipodes—and those have not been the best which were rushed into in the heyday of youth and passion. Nay, the two most wretched lives I ever saw near at hand, began in that tropical season and came to a wild rupture in a deadly tornado, like those which desolate tropical lands; but better such a beginning, even with such an end, than a marriage without love, which is, in fact, no marriage at all; God has no hand in it, and those whom He does not join together, no formula of blessing can unite; civil bonds may tie them prisoners, but every evil spirit of

passion may justify itself in thrusting them asunder.

And a one-sided love must be a perpetual craving, a perpetual ache, hard, hard to be borne. In Connie there was a great power of loving, much trustfulness, but also much exaction. No, she would not be satisfied with half measure, she would not be satisfied to share with any galvanic spectre of youthful passion, the heart for which all her own must be given in exchange. In the case of Dr. Julius and Miss Theodora Bousfield there would, doubtless, remain as long as both lived a mutual liking and respect, fuller, kindlier, more intimate, perhaps, than those of simple friendship between two who were never more than friends. But need this faithful sentiment infringe on the devotion due to a wife? Some wives would think so and rebel most jealously, most impotently. Our Connie had no knowledge, no experience, and no ideas, probably, on such problems, but once a wife she would be all or she would be nothing—she would be first in her husband's heart, or she would break her own with the jealous agony of unappeasable longing. I did not discern in her

any germs of that beautiful patience which enables some women to go through life, smiling martyrs, with a cruel fang deep bitten into their despised love ; good, quiet, affectionate women do this ; but with women to whom nature has given strong passions jealousy is deadly.

For my own part, I thought Dr. Julius fully free to woo, and win, and wear a new love if he would.

Now, there are some persons, women chiefly, I believe, who, having once given themselves, soul and spirit, to the dominion of a great passion, never recover from its loss ; thereafter they are, so to say, widowed for all the days of their lives. I do not say such persons are the best or the worst—the most to be blamed or the most to be admired—I simply say, some persons are thus constituted. In the chamber where love dwelt there are only burnt out fires, dust, ashes, darkness, but the owner will not sweep or garnish it, or kindle up its embers any more ; it is closed, sacred to the memory of one dead ; there shall be no joy in it any more for ever.

There are others who have warm affections,

more diffusive than concentrated, *they* must have something to love; their hearts, torn from their first stay, throw out feelers hither and thither, and find a new prop and cling to it as closely as to the other. The flowers of their lives are renewed like the spring, a few tears for the fallen fruit, and a kind welcome for the new bloom, and so they are happy.

And there are others whose love lives, yet changes; it has to abide in unfriendly shadow which never brings it to full ripeness; and some day the shadow is withdrawn, the sap bursts out with strength, other fruit buds and grows, and the unmaturing produce drops off unnoticed; nevertheless, it *was* the first fruit, but it looks pined and poor by the abundance of the later crops, and counts for nothing where that is gathered and garnered. So thought I the old love of Dr. Julius would look by the new, if he ever came to love our darling Connie.

Ursula kept her word with me so far as not reviving her premature speculations conversationally, but they must have gathered much silent strength during that week.

Dr. Julius had met Miss Martha Maurice and Connie at the Infirmary, and had walked half way back to Redcross with them, as Connie told us on her return. But the following afternoon he walked *all* the way, and brought to our house a large supply of bandages for Connie to hem for "her little patient," as he called Jessie—rather unnecessarily, I remember thinking, for are not hospitals and such places provided with everything requisite for the sick and suffering?

However, it was an excuse for him to come, which Connie cheerfully accepted; and an excuse for him to come again to see if they were finished, and, as they were not, to come a third time, when he carried them away. That might have sufficed, I should have thought, but he must needs drop in once more to say they fitted exactly—which, as they were made under his own professional directions, was a matter of course.

"Five times in a week; that is pretty well," observed Ursie, without the addition of another word, but I understood all she meant to imply, and began to think she had right and reason on her side for once.

Well, and if she had? So much the better; I was prepared heartily to wish by this time the event might prove it so!

But perversely Connie's interest seemed to be for Jessie; not for Jessie's physician; for while she diligently sewed those lengths of linen she talked frequently of *her*, but of *him* never; somehow, his name had become rarer on her lips than any other.

Papa and mamma looked on and were very kind to the little one, but they said never a word; and I often wondered whether or no they had any suspicion of what was in the air; if they had they only spoke to each other about it.

Poor papa and mamma! They were more together now than, perhaps, they had ever been since the earliest days of their marriage. They preferred living in the dining-room where, in this summer weather, they sat side by side opposite the window, and often hand in hand, instead of staying with us: they said we chattered so much, especially Ursula and Connie, that we tired them and made their heads ache when they wanted to be still.

They had subsided very quietly into our quiet life. If they were changed, the change had come too gradually to startle any of us; I had, indeed, to revive before my mind's eye, my father's cheerful face and impetuous temper, and to raise up whole scenes at Roseberry when I wanted to judge how far his misfortunes had altered him; and then I saw it, in the bowed white head, the shrunken figure, the subdued fire which only gave forth a rare spark of sarcasm; and I knew why he took refuge by mamma and mamma by him, and why they recoiled from the gaiety and hopes even of their children: they were shadows of the disappointments of the world, and would not come across their sunshine. But the bitterness of regret was past and the heat of their day over; they rested, and the busy earth went round and the golden hours dawned on the generation that would be after them.

I can see them now—ah me! the young have not all the romance to themselves, nor all the tragedy, nor all the pathos, nor all the love! So different as it had been with that old pair!

Where was now papa's energy, his courage, his vivacity? where his credit, his proud honesty? his hearty welcome for his many friends? the luxuries with which he delighted to surround us all? Is there no tragedy in losses like these? no pathos in coming down in the world? Money is dross—but money is a vast power of goodness and kindness well used, and he had been a generous friend, a liberal master—I am sure the hardest part of our poverty to my father was that he had nothing left to *give*. Mamma felt it less; her home virtues, always of the gentle, kindly sort, suited our cottage as well as they suited Roseberry. How well I remember papa admonishing her in jest that she was not half dashing wife enough for him! Poor mamma, he had forgotten *that* when they were going down hill together, and thought there was not another woman in the world to equal her! She took such fond care of him—I have heard her say often she trusted God would not call her first, for what would he do without her?

The sorrows of the aged who must still soon have done with sorrow touch me more now than

the passionate griefs of youth. *They have finished* Hope's flattering tale; they have *realized* the vanity of all things under the sun and have only to *wait* until Death, the sovereign all-healer, bids them depart in peace out of the struggle and strife of living.

Waiting—I have learnt all its sad significance through many an hour of pain and bitter, bitter repining; some of its comfort too, I have learnt; but the lesson has been long and is imperfect yet. When I remember papa and mamma studying it hand in hand, in broken fortunes but *together* and in calm, I am ready to weep for pity over myself, who have been at it for years and *alone*, and have hardly yet got to see the justice tempered with mercy in the Almighty will which must be done.

Where am I? I imagined I had begun the chapter of Connie's love and behold me straying through the old Thought-Book and the dismal labyrinth of my own sufferings! Let me go back into the sunshine, or rather let me lay down my pen and listen to the sweet Avonmore Church bells ringing their familiar chime

and its burden of "so long ago, so long, long ago, so long, long ago," until the ghosts are laid, and pleasant fancies come back with heavenlier thoughts!

III.

ON THE DARK SIDE OF FORTUNE.

THE Scarcliffe Church Bazaar, which was advertised to take place towards the latter end of August, now began to engage nearly all the leisure and all the conversation throughout the parish, everybody being interested in what everybody else was doing for it. One morning about a fortnight after Connie and I returned from Aberford, I had to walk down with papa to the library on the Borough Hill, and, as usual, since the excitement began, I went charged with a list of trifling commissions for our charitable work; the library being then, as now, the chief Fancy Repository in the town.

While papa was conning over his newspaper in the reading-room and I was choosing my skeins of silk and wool, there entered Mr. Westmore,

to whom Mr. Simeon Moore, the librarian, handed a small post parcel, shaking his grey head and shrugging his shoulders with an air of regretful vexation as he said :—

“ Declined with thanks, once more, sir.”

Mr. Westmore received it, apparently, as a matter of course, and after standing a moment or two by the counter in meditative silence, he went away without a word. He had not observed me, and I did not think he would like to have his attention challenged just then, but I could not help looking after him as he retired. He had very much the air of a scholar who is poor and strives to disguise the melancholy fact, or of a gentleman, driven to take the shady side of Fortune’s highway, who persistently remembers when he walked in the sunshine with the best.

When papa rejoined me I told him who had been there, and he said he wished he had seen Mr. Westmore; he should have liked to shake hands with him again, though it was so many years since they had met that the chances were the young man would not remember his father’s

former friend. We had to go round the corner of the Borough hill to post letters and buy stamps for Ursula, who declined patronizing our careless Redcross widow, and just as we reached the post-office, Mr. Westmore came in sight, advancing quickly from the opposite direction. He now recognized me, and bowing hurriedly was passing on, when papa cried out,—

“Paul, my dear fellow, have you forgotten an old acquaintancé?” on which he stopt and appeared not displeased by the recognition.

Our way home was the same, and Mr. Westmore gave my father his arm up the hill while I dropt behind, leaving them to renew their intimacy by themselves. When we reached our garden-door, papa would have had him go in to see mamma, but he excused himself and struck off alone across the old grove-fields.

In speaking of this meeting afterwards, papa said he should not press his intimacy on Mr. Westmore any further, for he had not met his advances with cordiality and appeared to wish to avoid disturbance in his recluse life; he also said that his mother never left her house, except to go

to church, and had for many years refused to see any one besides her own children. Mamma thought it a pity, but at the same time she said they had every right to shield themselves from intrusion if such were their desire.

“Only,” she concluded with a little regret, “I should have liked to see Mrs. Westmore again, we were such old friends, and we were amongst the very few who upheld our faith in her husband’s innocence, when all the rest of the world believed him guilty. Since he is dead and the remembrance of their dishonour is almost worn out, it seems cruel to perpetuate their isolation.”

Ursula, however, thought the Westmores had decided prudently to keep themselves to themselves,—

“For,” said she, “the sense of disgrace must be always secretly present with them, and they must be well aware that no motive beyond compassion would lead respectable people to treat them as friends. For my part, I am not ambitious of their acquaintance—I see no reason why we should be hail-fellow-well-met with

everybody fallen into calamity because we have seen better days ourselves."

But Ursula was, nevertheless, ultimately the person instrumental in bringing Mr. Westmore within our doors. On the sensible plea that knowledge is light to carry, and that if circumstances ever should make it necessary for her to take a situation, a little Latin might be very useful to her, especially if there were boys to teach, she had, during our absence at aunt Maria's, inquired of Mr. Simeon Moore whether he could recommend to her any person qualified to afford the instruction she required. The librarian promised to bear her wants in mind, and a day or two after the rencounter of which I have spoken above, on going down to the town with her again, he mentioned Mr. Westmore as a teacher who was ready to give private lessons in classical literature to either young or advanced pupils. Ursula demurred for a moment, and then said rather abruptly,—

"Let me have a sheet of notepaper and I will write down what I want. One efficient master will be just the same to me as another."

And accordingly she indited a brief notice to the effect that a young lady required lessons in Latin once a week—terms not to exceed five shillings the hour—added her name and address, and left it in the librarian's hands.

Perhaps Mr. Simeon Moore observed Ursula's hesitation, for, as he received the paper, he said ;—

“Mr. Westmore has just been re-arranging my Scarcliffe and Redcross Guide, and he has done it admirably well. He is a fine scholar, but I imagine he is one of those men whose temperament is against their achieving any great measure of worldly success. Phrenologically speaking, I never saw a more grandly built head in my life ; it is grievous to see him sunk in obscure poverty, and almost wilfully sunk, as I may say.”

The librarian was the politest mannered man in Scarcliffe, and with my sister Ursula, whom he evidently considered a clever, superior person, he was always frankly conversational. Ursula read the most solid books on his shelves which, perhaps, no other lady on his subscription-list

would touch, and he favoured her, in return, with the first perusal of his monthly supply of magazines and reviews.

Willing to learn all that was to be learnt concerning her probable instructor, she now echoed Mr. Simeon Moore's "*wilfully*" in a tone which implied a wish for further information, and the librarian, not reluctant to give it, reiterated,—

"Yes, wilfully, Miss Fletcher. He has brilliant powers, but he is one of the most unpractical persons I ever had to deal with. He has theories of society, government and law which he believes would set the world, perverse as it is, all right, if he could gain a hearing for them; but there's the difficulty,—he cannot; and, like all theorizing enthusiasts, he is obstinately set against advice. I have said to him myself, 'Sir, throw your ideas into the form of a romance and then they will stand a chance of being read,' but he treats the suggestion with scorn. His views, he declares, are palatable enough to go down without any sugaring of the lip of the cup, and so he holds out his remedy for every manner of social disease,

proclaiming that there is the specific to cure them all; never taking into account that nine-tenths of the world hug their chronic complaints as an integral part of the body corporate, and would much rather suffer the ills they know of than encounter the ameliorating processes."

"So much the wiser they; your reforming geniuses would upset everything," replied Ursula with much decision.

"I have read some of his theories and they are quite Utopian," Mr. Simeon Moore continued. "The views he develops will never do for the world as it is—could never fit any world where the New Testament morality had not permeated all classes and societies of men. Many immaterial circumstances and accidents of life have certainly been elevated into fictitious importance, and a low tone of principle and feeling is the prevalent tone in our highly civilized world—but then it always has been so."

"So much the greater need then," I ventured to say, "that in every generation there should rise up a few men entirely simple, pure and

unselfish to protest against the baseness and corruption which are the ultimate issue of such a tone."

Ursula smiled superior and intimated that this subject was beyond me and I had better not meddle with it, but the librarian turned his head in my direction and addressed his conclusive reply to me.

"But, meanwhile, the men must live," said he; "they must work in the groove for bread though they pay away for their freedom of protesting against venality every possible luxury and comfort of existence. Mr. Westmore's eccentricities of thought may be nearer to absolute truth and justice than the rules which expedience has been evolving through ages from the wants and condition of men; I do not deride the far-sighted and fine-sighted perceptions of his genius, but I submit that without any shuffling or truckling or negation of principle he might do many things to better his condition which he perversely neglects. Here he is in Scarcliffe, day by day, giving Latin lessons in ladies' schools and drilling Sir Philip Harding's two dull boys through

an elementary education—is that suitable work for a man whose scholarship is so great as his? I took a vast interest in him from the moment I saw him—I said to myself, ‘There is an able man going begging,’ and I sounded him on the subject of editing our weekly gazette, of which he might be the making if he would keep his crotchets out of it; and, at the same time, he might raise up influential friends to himself; pecuniarily speaking, too, it would be an improvement on his present mill-horse drudgery—but, no! he has a craze to preserve his moral and mental independence, and I suppose he will preserve them though he starve. I know him now, but he puzzled me at the beginning of our acquaintance;—capability and honour never fail so signally in the long run, unless there be some weakness or crotchet of character for them always to stumble at. I am not aware of his antecedents, but I would pledge my own credit for his, Miss Fletcher; he has been unfortunate, not from any fault, I am persuaded, but because with the finest intellect and the purest spirit of disinterestedness he does not combine the coarse

working powers which are no less essential to the achievement of success."

Perhaps I knew more than the librarian himself in elucidation of Mr. Westmore's failures, but there was no necessity to make any revelation of those long-past events over which time had drawn a veil. Ursula was on the point, however, of enlightening him, when the opportune entrance of Mr. Foxley diverted his attention from ourselves and gave me the chance of stopping her ill-advised communication. She acknowledged afterwards that she was glad I had done so; probably we were the only people in the neighbourhood in possession of his secret, and we ought to be the last to betray it to his injury.

Ursula had acquired some interest in him from Mr. Simeon Moore's account. The opportunity of nobleness is not given to all, and the mind to seize it when it comes in the way is given but to few. Mr. Westmore, it seemed, was one of those rare characters who for their principles will dare to be eccentric, poor and contemned. I should not have admired

him half so much if he had temporized to the attainment of the utmost success and prosperity; but Ursula said she thought it the very acme of folly for a man to neglect any chance of pushing up in the world, and she seriously threatened that if Mr. Westmore became her teacher and ever gave her an opening, she would as good as tell him so. The upshot of the negotiation was that in a few days Mr. Westmore called at our house, and was engaged to come every Monday afternoon at four o'clock to give Ursula an hour's instruction on his way home after his duties in Scarcliffe were done. Ursula excluded all of us from the drawing-room during the initiatory lesson, but she afterwards expressed herself as highly satisfied with his method of teaching and his tact in keeping his place.

“But as for his being a *genius*,” she added, “I should say rather that he is one of the most mechanical, unimpressionable men that ever breathed. He does not interest me one bit now that I have seen him, and I am quite determined to keep him at a distance. I won't have mamma coming in with any foolish, fond reminiscences

of his early days—poor dear mamma, she is so sentimental!”

Ursula's wishes being made known, poor dear mamma kept in the background, like all the rest of us, and for any friendliness that was shown to Mr. Westmore, he might have been an utter stranger up to the moment of his introduction as her teacher. But she told us that if he required a testimonial to obtain other pupils, she should always be glad to speak in his favour as an efficient, attentive master; and in pursuance of this object she did, in fact, shortly afterwards mention him to Dr. Julius Eden.

“Westmore? do you know his Christian name?” Dr. Julius asked, with an appearance of interest.

Ursula referred to a book he had lent her, and said it was “Paul.”

“When I was at Westminster there was a Paul Westmore, Captain of the School—can it be the same? He was a fine-looking fellow—quite a hero to me; I have never felt the awful reverence and admiration since that I felt for him. He went to Oxford, and great honour

and glory we expected him to gain, but there was some catastrophe in his family and he withdrew from the University without his degree. I never knew what become of him afterwards."

"Very likely these two Paul Westmores are one. Mr. Simeon Moore said he was clever though in obscure circumstances."

"*Clever!*" said Dr. Julius with a contemptuous stress on the adjective. "So he teaches elementary Latin and Greek, does he? Well, fine instruments are sometimes put to mean uses."

Ursula remarked afterwards very crossly,—

"I declare, one ought never to speak of anybody to anybody else! Who would have imagined that Dr. Julius Eden had been at school with Mr. Westmore? Such a singular coincidence! And he seemed rather huffed too! If Mr. Westmore never gets another pupil to teach I will not say a word for him again. Put to a mean use, indeed! What did Dr. Julius signify by *that*? Men in much better positions than Mr. Westmore teach elementary Latin and Greek."

And thenceforward Ursula did refrain her

praise and her patronage from her master, who was equally above both; and not long afterwards we learnt that Dr. Julius and Mr. Westmore had met at the library and renewed their acquaintance, on which she relaxed her vigilance over ourselves and permitted papa and mamma occasionally to have speech of him too; but his own reserved habits effectually discouraged for the present anything like intimacy.

IV.

THE BAZAAR.

THE Scarcliffe Church bazaar was made the excuse for numerous contingent amusements, and as the week of its celebration drew on, their character began showily to develop itself in the mercers' shop-windows. Avalanches of gossamer spotted with colour or tinsel, rivulets of glistening sashes, miniature parterres of artificial flowers, rich stiff brocades for dowagers, bonnets plumed, ribboned, and wreathed, and every variety of head-tire for eclipsing the glory of womankind, made of the High Street and the fashionable end of the Borough Hill a scene almost as gay as the ball-room and flower-show, where they were ultimately destined to figure. For charity's sake it was to be feared that the milliners and haberdashers would reap a richer harvest from the

sale of their finery than the stall-holders at the bazaar, though selling for a Christian object, would from the sale of their frippery. It was Connie who made the observation, and added that she should like a statistical comparison to be instituted at the week's end, between the pounds that went in new dressing the occasion and the shillings that went to the building of the church. Perhaps a little personal feeling inspired the remark, for notwithstanding Ursula's disclaimer of any further interference about Connie, at her instigation it had nevertheless been ruled, that as the little one was not *out* there need be no expenditure in pretty clothes for her; and that though she might go to the bazaar, like other children, she would not, of course, appear at any of the evening entertainments.

The nobility, gentry, and clergy of the neighbourhood mustered in great force on the opening day, but the individual who achieved for himself the greatest distinction was the Fortuner. The entrance fee was half-a-crown, but that generous little man had provided himself with three fifty-

pound notes, one of which he left with each treasurer at the three doors of admittance. The public room had been very tastefully decorated under the experienced supervision of the lady patronesses; there were eleven stalls, five ranged *vis-à-vis* down each long side of the room, and a larger one at the upper end for refreshments; at the lower end over the chief entrance was the orchestra, in which the town quadrille band was accommodated.

It may perhaps be as well to enumerate the holders of the stalls, though to chronicle their multifarious wares would be a most tedious work of supererogation. Let precedence then be given to the refreshment stall, where cosy Miss Jemima Moore, the sister of the librarian, presided over all manner of things good and sweet, cool and sustaining, such as are in high request on sunshiny fête-days. The old lady was in rich grey silk, with the finest of lace aprons, frills, and caps, and had under her a staff of girls who had volunteered themselves into her service; they were all girls experienced in bazaars, and were well aware how attractive the ices, lemonade, and fruit become

when the room grows hot ; very nice they looked, too, in their fresh muslin attire and vaporous tulle bonnets, bedight with little coquetries of feathers and flowers, but still not one of them was of the first order of beauty—*that* was to be found at Mrs. Maurice's stall, where, besides her own daughters and our indefatigable Ursula, was also Mistress Connie. Connie was not to be a saleswoman ; she was only to look on from the background and enter the articles sold in a little account book ; altogether she considered herself rather hardly used on the occasion, and she had come to the bazaar in a lilac gingham dress, a holland jacket and a brown straw hat of the mushroom shape ; perhaps she was not entirely unaware of the becoming effect of that chinafied piece of head-gear, for it was at her option to have put on her Sunday bonnet instead—a neat Dunstable poke with a white ribbon crossed over the crown. Mrs. Maurice's stall was at the top right-hand side of the room, with Mrs. Willoughby's opposite ; then in order of honour followed those presided over by the wife of the reigning mayor, by Mrs. Peacocke, Mrs. Brown

Standon, Mrs. Cranmer, Mr. Foxley's sisters who kept his house, and the spouses of the head lawyer, brewer, and builder in Scarcliffe. Each chief lady was supported by daughters, nieces, unmarried sisters, or other young friends, and the casual visitors to the town must have carried away the impression that it was far from deficient in native beauty.

By two o'clock the saleswomen were at their posts, the band was tuning up and the High Street was all amove. I had been dragged off early by Ursula, though I was only to make one in the miscellaneous company, and so I saw all the gay folks arrive. Countess Calcedon and grandchildren, Lady Claridge and her son, Archdeacon Clinton, his wife and daughters, two select boarding-schools, all the neighbouring rectors, vicars, and curates, with their respective families, officers from the castle, strangers and visitors by dozens, and genteel townsfolk by scores.

Mrs. Willoughby's daughters were, perhaps, the most generally popular and attractive amongst the young saleswomen, and the military supported them throughout the day with much gallantry.

Miss Ethel with pretty audacity gathered up half-crowns and half-sovereigns in exchange for Topsy pen-wipers, book-marks, and pincushions of most inferior value. She fleeced some of the inexperienced gentlemen mercilessly, and her mamma was once or twice obliged to put in a soft word of reproof of which the enterprising beauty was but little mindful. What, she wished to know, was the use of laying aside her character of private gentlewoman and turning shopkeeper unless she was allowed to have her bit of fun? So she had her bit of fun and did her bit of mischief. I hope Ensign Short was satisfied, on mature reflection, with the investment he had made of his quarter's pocket-money in embroidered cigar-cases, blotting-books, pen-wipers, and angelic smiles; I trust Lieutenant Bushy felt his braces cheap at fifty shillings, and found them everlasting in wear; and that Mrs. Knox gave her gallant colonel only a mild wiggling in return for the three-guinea sofa-cushion, which she could have patched out of her odds and ends of ribbon for a matter of three shillings.

Some of the stall-holders opposite who were

less successful in the disposal of their wares animadverted severely on Miss Ethel's proneness to flirtation, but triumph came to them also, by and by, in the shape of the Fortuner. Up to three o'clock, Mrs. Maurice and her daughters had only been patronized by those penurious folks, who, even at a bazaar, like money's worth for their money: the dressing-gowns, and braided frocks and ornamental aprons, which could be worn, had gone off pretty well; but Ursula's contributions of tapestry cushions and mats still embellished the places where they had been originally displayed, and nobody had thought it worth while even to look at Connie's and my poor little achievements. But when Mr. Barstow, after the distribution of his fifty-pound notes, made his way to the top of the room, the tide turned, and Ursula's chagrined expression of countenance quickly gave way to one of jubilant satisfaction.

"Now, Miss Ursula, show me some of your handiwork," said the little man, gaily. "I have brought a pocketful of money!" And the Maurices, with the utmost disinterestedness, allowed her to

dispose of all her drawing-room toys without intruding anything of their own. He bought up every rattle-trap in which she had set a stitch, and during the rest of the afternoon never once parted company with a large embroidered cushion which was his first purchase. He seemed truly sorry when there was nothing more of hers to buy, but rather than go away with any coin in his purse, he afterwards took compassion on several articles of the Maurices' workmanship and on a satin sachet that I had made, though he had evidently no idea whatever of the use to which it was to be put. Ursula endured a few sly insinuations from her friends with a perfect good grace; she said she was willing to make a sacrifice of herself for the good of the church to the extent of being quizzed for a day or two.

It was not until after four o'clock that Dr. Julius Eden made his appearance, but when he had bowed his way past the other stalls, he came to an anchor at Mrs. Maurice's, and was the purchaser of a very badly crocheted purse which Connie had done.

"It is not worth half-a-crown," said Ursula,

dangling it contemptuously across her forefinger ;
“ we must let you have it for eighteen-pence.”

But Dr. Julius, feigning to examine it critically, said it was substantial in fabric, grave in colour and would wear well, and he would give a guinea for it, if Ursula would excuse him buying anything more : his uncle did not allow cushions, antimacassars and worsted screens in his house, or he should have been proud to make himself the possessor of many of the elegant articles which decorated the stall. His plea was graciously admitted, and he stayed for a little talk, commending generally the appearance of the room and the muster of company, until the Fortuner, who was still hovering in Ursula's vicinity, asked him if he had ever seen a handsomer gathering of women either at home or abroad ; to which he, of course, replied in the negative. From that Mr. Barstow proceeded to particulars and wished to know which stall, in his opinion, displayed the loveliest garland of girls, sufficiently pointing his own preference by his admiring glances at Ursula, who laughed encouragingly ; until Dr. Julius closed the discussion by purchasing of Miss Jemima Moore a big

rosy apple and presenting it to Connie in the background, when she said with an air of pique,—

“You are ingenious in compliment, Dr. Julius, but I do not believe Connie has learnt so far *as* the letter V in the classical dictionary yet.”

The mushroom hat was almost as good as a mask to Connie, but though she dipped it quite low as she transferred Dr. Julius' gift to her pocket, an observant person might have seen without any difficulty at all her lips parted in a smile, and a blush melting into the dimples about them in a very pretty, significant way—whatever her proficiency in the classical dictionary, she understood what the apple implied as distinctly as Ursie herself, and perhaps was not displeased at the distinction it conferred after she had been forced to come to the bazaar in every-day, shore-going costume.

Connie was a good little soul, but she was not angelic, and at this period neither very wise nor very experienced; but her imperfections had a charm of their own for Dr. Julius, who, though at his coming he had said he had but a short quarter of an hour to spare, ended by remaining

until the bazaar closed for that day, and afterwards walking nearly all the way home with the little one and myself, while Ursula followed with the Maurices.

Ursula wanted Connie to eat her apple that evening, but Connie laughed and said, No, she should make a chimney-piece ornament of it, which she did; and it decorated our room until it lost its beauty and nurse Bradshaw, unaware of its preciousness, threw it away.

V.

THE FORTUNER PROPOSES.

HAVING done my duty on the first day of the bazaar, I received a dispensation from any further attendance, and rather to my surprise, Connie also demanded and obtained leave to stay away. She found it tiresome to be perched on an office-stool for four hours in a heated room enacting the part of junior clerk, and Ursula, when appealed to, said very graciously that she could be done without; and thus our share in the gaieties and gravities came to a summary and welcome conclusion.

But Ursula went vigorously through the labour of enjoying everything; gossipy visitations in the morning; diligent selling of bazaar stuff in the afternoon and conversation meetings at night; she was an active mover in the raffles by means

of which the relics were dispersed; she bloomed at the flower-show; she shot at the archery meetings; she betted gloves at the regatta; she danced at the ball with which the proceedings were wound up; for under the chaperonage of Mrs. Maurice, Miss Cranmer or Mrs. Peacocke she was enabled to appear everywhere with propriety and even with advantage; while we at home were contented to take all on hearsay and to imagine the triumphs of popularity which she had achieved.

Next to Ursula I think, perhaps, the Fortuner had earned to himself the greatest glory and renown during this period of public festivity, and being naturally reluctant to retire into the eclipse of private life after once tasting the delights of celebrity, he announced his intention of giving a fête in his beautiful park at Avonmore, which was to be something in the style of Miss Pegge Burnell's strawberry gatherings, but altogether gayer and grander.

In pursuance of this project he came to our house one morning in a state of joyous, nervous excitement to consult Ursula about the details.

She was well pleased at being deferred to, and offered him most extravagant hints, to every one of which the little man acceded with glee, observing again and again that "Money was no object—he only wanted to get up a good thing—a perfect success in its way." Ursula's practical administrative powers stood him in excellent stead, and she amiably gave up the whole of one day, at his urgent request, for the purpose of driving over to Avonmore with their mutual friend Mrs. Peacocke, to settle upon the best site for the erection of the luncheon-tent. She returned from her visit most fluent in her praises of the place, which she described as far preferable to Redcross Priory; in fact, she said, there could be no comparison between them, the Priory being an out-of-date, old-world house, while that at Avonmore had been rebuilt within the last twenty years in the finest Italian manner, and was crowded with every luxury of art and taste. Mr. Barstow had been sensible enough to content himself with all as he found it, and Ursula remarked with visible regret that there was nothing apparently out of its place but the poor little Fortuner himself.

The fête when it came off, which it did at the end of the following week, was allowed on all hands to have been quite the most brilliant affair of the season. Connie and I were not present, but from the sly insinuations of our friends we soon learnt that Ursula had been conspicuously honoured by the host ; she, however, laughed down their significant remarks with loud indifference, and professed to regard his assiduities as signifying nothing but ignorance of the ways and customs of polite society. But when Mr. Barstow began to call every day, always with an excuse to ask her opinion about some little improvement that was to be effected in the conservatories or flower-gardens at Avonmore, I took the liberty of thinking otherwise, and the event proved my previsions to be correct.

It was about ten days after the close of the bazaar, and only four after the Avonmore fête, while I was idly resting and musing up in the retirement of my own room, that Ursula walked in with a lofty, excited air, her face very red and a sort of irrepressible quiver and swell all over her.

"What do you think, Doris?" she began, incoherently.

I said I did not know.

"That preposterous little Fortuner has actually had the audacity to make me an offer to my face! to my face, Doris!" she cried emphatically.

I said, "Oh!"

"You may well be astonished. I was never so taken aback in my life!"

"And what did you say to him?" I inquired with anxiety.

"Say to him? why, of course, I said No to him! What else do you expect I should say?"

"I was not sure, Ursie—you have been so good-natured lately, helping him with his plans for the improvement of Avonmore, and so forth, that he may have counted on that as encouragement."

"And so forth, and so forth, don't be provoking, Doris!" exclaimed she angrily; "nobody but an idiot could ever suppose that I was flattering the poor little man with self-interested designs. Any woman who consents to marry him will lay herself open to the imputation of having married

for nothing but money—well, I don't intend to do that. I would rather be the quintessence of old-maidism, with all its pettiness, till doomsday, than become the property of a fool and a butt for everybody's sarcasm; and I would rather work my fingers to the bone and starve ultimately on two meals a day than share all the luxuries of Avonmore with that chin-tuft, wig, and velvet-collared coat."

"I am thankful to hear you say so, Ursie,—it would have been very mortifying to all of us if you had thought otherwise," said I, much relieved.

"There was not much chance of my thinking otherwise, but you need not depreciate him, Doris," returned she shortly. "Little oddity as he is to look at, many persons have a sincere respect for him. He is generous to a proverb and quixotically honourable, and I don't know that it is exactly a natural inference that he must needs remain a bachelor because he is ugly. I daresay there are plenty of women who would be glad to take him to be mistress of Avonmore; and I am sure that he really and truly admires me with

all his heart and all his soul, and that he was woefully disappointed at my sending him away as I did."

"I have not a doubt of it, Ursie," said I, soothingly, for she appeared for some reason or other deeply annoyed.

"Of course, you have not a doubt of it," she rejoined. "If I had accepted him, I would so have transmogrified him that not even his own mother should have known him again. I would have torn that wig from his head and have made him go bald, as his fifty years may very well excuse his doing; I would have had off that moustache and chin-tuft in a twinkling, and any ingenious tailor would soon have dressed him into a more manly shape. It is his assumed eccentricities that have made him such a ridiculous figure of fun, and I believe it to be quite within the compass of art to make him look a perfectly commonplace, respectable, middle-aged gentleman, such as any woman might marry without feeling that she had made herself contemptible."

Here Ursula paused, evidently expecting me to say something, so I said,—

"But as you do not care for him, it was wisest to refuse."

"But I easily *could* care for him," replied she, nodding her head defiantly. "With a sensible wife at his elbow to look after him he would soon improve. I have not your high-flown, fantastical notions about love and stuff, and I could adapt myself to anybody who was moderately sensible and well-bred. But you need not fear my changing my mind—a woman takes her standing from her husband, and I will never take mine from a laughing-stock, though he were as rich as Croesus!"

I felt satisfied that Ursie now meant what she said, so I held my peace, lest I should again unwittingly trespass on a tender corn, but my silence now was all in the wrong.

"One would think, Doris, that offers were as plentiful as blackberries to see you sitting there without a word to say. Whatever *you* may think about it, *I* think Mr. Barstow paid me a compliment!" she said with dignity.

"Certainly, Ursie dear, certainly—the greatest compliment a man can pay a woman," I hastened to assure her.

"I am glad you admit *that*; you seemed disposed to treat it as nothing particular, instead of giving me credit for having done something magnanimous. I can tell you this, Doris, I don't think more than two young women in ten of our acquaintance would have acted like me, with the alternative of turning out as a governess staring them in the face! You are the first person I have told and you will be the last—of course papa and mamma must know, but they don't count. I shall not speak of it out of doors, or it will travel like wild-fire, and I consider it extremely improper to publish the fact of my having inflicted on the poor little fellow the mortification of a refusal."

I said that was a right feeling, and I do not think she ever did tell anybody except Mrs. Peacocke, Mrs. Braithwaite and Miss Cranmer, who in turn whispered it to their confidential friends again, and so in a very brief time it became a secret which everybody knew. But the Fortuner had carried his disappointment to town, and was happily out of the way of neighbourly condolences.

VI.

A HEN-PARTY.

THE week following this event Ursula had another serious communication for my private ear, which was, that she had finally made up her mind to take a situation, and had written to Miss Heywood on the subject by that day's post.

"Without consulting any of us, Ursie, and without asking papa's and mamma's leave?" said I, surprised.

"Yes. It was of no use to invite an opposition which I had determined should not weigh with me," was her answer.

"But you will tell them now what you have done?"

"I don't know—where is the good of making them uncomfortable sooner than needs? I think I shall wait until I hear from Miss Heywood;

I have told her my capabilities and the salary I shall expect, and that I should prefer an engagement in London, and when we see what she thinks of my chances it will be time enough to speak."

So the communication was delayed for about a week, at the end of which time there came a kind letter from our old governess quite sufficiently encouraging to cause Ursula to publish her intentions forthwith, throughout our family circle and our immediate circle of friends and acquaintances. Mamma was grieved but quiescent, papa was grieved and fidgety—he was a proud man in his way, poor papa, and in his old-fashioned notions it seemed almost a degradation for a daughter of his to take wages for any service done amongst strangers. He talked to me about it incessantly and felt more pained at Ursula's anxiety to escape from home than I could have anticipated. I spoke to Ursie in the hope that she might, perhaps, be prevailed on to change her mind, but she said, No, she wished she had kept to her original design and gone out at our first coming to Redcross.

"You see, Doris, I am doing nothing here,"

she represented frankly. "The dull dissipation of a watering-place would soon pall upon me; I have enjoyed it for once, but it would become a mere toil of a pleasure if I had to look forward to its recurrence, season after season, with nothing more solid in the background than a repetition of the Fortuner's proposal. There is no prospect of my settling in life, and if anything were to happen to papa and mamma I should be obliged to go out. I am much too independent to sponge upon you, and I would rather begin to work now than wait until it becomes a necessity."

And in these views she made her inquiries after ladies in want of a governess very sedulously, but for some time without results. Her acquirements were considerable, and as she had no special talent for music or any other accomplishment, she could not expect to obtain the charge of any but young children. Several negotiations were begun but closed unsuccessfully; for Ursula was resolved not to rank herself amongst the ruck of poor, desolate, oppressed governesses by under-rating her own deserts. One proposal she received from a lady of quality who offered no

salary, but said it would be an advantage that would follow any young woman all the days of her life to have been employed at her first going out in the education of her daughters, but Ursula declined it peremptorily. She had three cardinal rules laid down from which she would not depart: sensible rules too, the steady adherence to which was probably the main element of success in her comfortable governesshood afterwards.

“I must and will have a bedroom to myself,” said she. “If I wanted a good cry where could I hide myself if a chattering little child had the run of it? And I will have my evenings in the schoolroom to read and study on my own account, and also because I will never become a bore to people who would wish me away. I know if I were married, I should not like a girl always planted there between me and my husband when we were sat down for a *cose*—governesses are a necessary nuisance, but they need not be quite so intolerable as *that*. When there is a room full of company where one more does not matter, if they choose to ask me to join them, I’ll go and be glad of the change; but no one

need expect me to expose myself to the insolent freedom of men and the patronage of women by putting on an air of mock humility and introducing myself as, 'Only the governess.' No, I shall respect myself, and oblige everybody else to see that they are to respect me too."

These were two of her stand-points—her evenings and her bedroom to herself; her third was a salary of eighty guineas a year. All our friends were soon familiar with them, and Mrs. Peacocke, while intimating that she thought the salary exorbitant, lamented deeply that there should be any necessity for her to go out at all. Ursula insisted on her understanding that it was not from *necessity* but from *choice* that she sought occupation, and this view of it our acquaintance considerably adopted.

While the business was still unsettled Miss Pegge Burnell kindly gave us the opportunity of meeting the two Miss Layels at her house to drink tea. Both the sisters had been governesses resident in families, and Ursula was anxious to subject them to a close catechization into the alleged miseries and persecutions of the class

that she might have some idea where to guard against encroachment and how successfully to resist injustice.

On our way to the Priory we met the sisters and joined company with them, walking all together up the avenue, in which we encountered Mr. Westmore, whom Miss Pegge Burnell had engaged, on Ursula's recommendation, to refresh her slight knowledge of Greek. He bowed to Ursula and myself, and passed on, and a few moments afterwards, turning to speak to Miss Kitty Layel, I perceived that she had dropped behind.

"Come along, Kitty; what are you dreaming about?" cried her sister briskly, and Miss Kitty rejoined us with nervous haste. "Moonstruck," added Miss Jenny, peering under her bonnet. "You would scarcely believe it, Miss Fletcher, but our Kitty is as tenderly romantic still as a girl of sixteen. That young moon rising between the trees fascinated her to the spot, or was it something besides, Kitty?"

There was no reply; indeed, Miss Kitty scarcely seemed to hear the rallying question, and with

a second inquisitive glance at her downcast face, her sister let her alone and initiated a book talk with Ursula which lasted them until we reached the Priory.

Miss Pegge Burnell received us in her charming drawing-room, where a pleasant fire of pine knots was flashing in the wide grate and a shaded lamp standing in the midst of the round damask-covered tea-table. It was quite a *hen-party*, and a small one, and we soon fell into easy, friendly chat.

Had I not be assured to the contrary I should have thought Miss Jenny Layel by several years the elder of her sister, for she had an affectionately arbitrary manner towards her which betrayed an acknowledged supremacy; at least, in minor affairs. For example, while Miss Jenny, in harmony with her iron-grey hair, chose to attire herself in plain black silk, she insisted on Miss Kitty's prolonging her youth and beauty by every innocent art of dress within their means. So there, by Miss Pegge Burnell's fireside, sat the dark draped figure of a little woman, still three years on the sunny side of thirty, dressed as

might befit a nun, while her sister of four years more was in white muslin robes, with soft puffings, frills and blue ribbons about her fair throat, and bright clustered ringlets shading the pale rose of her cheek. Certainly she looked much the nicer, and Miss Jenny could not resist whispering to me, "Isn't our Kitty lovely?" in an enthusiastic way which testified the utmost admiration of her sister. "Our Kitty" must have been very pretty in her youth, but as she leant down towards the fire and watched the white wood-ashes drifting noiseless upon the hearth, I thought I had never seen a face with an expression so melancholy. Miss Jenny made two or three efforts to rouse her but desisted at last, in consideration of a supplicating glance and a pathetic, "Don't tease, Jenny, nothing's the matter."

Where Ursula and Miss Pegge Burnell were there could, however, be no lack of talk, and when tea was over and we had formed a semi-circle about the fire, Ursie plunged midway into the subject of her curiosity by saying without circumlocution,—

"You two, Miss Layel, have both been governesses. I wish you would tell me how much is fact and how much is fiction in the popular estimate of that position."

Miss Kitty looked to her sister to reply and Miss Jenny said forthwith,—

"You must first state what is the popular estimate you allude to."

"They are always under suspicion; they are regarded as menials; they are under-paid; they are overworked; they are condemned to a life of isolation; they are sneered down, snubbed, bullied, harassed and finally starved; as a class, they are worse off and worse used than any other set of women under the sun. *That*, I take it, is the common view of governesses."

Miss Jenny smiled at Ursula's vehemence, and Miss Kitty looked up in mild surprise and gently said,—

"Half the cry over their grievances is only cant; it gained the public ear once and has been traded on ever since; and the real case has been damaged by overstatements and misrepresentations."

"That is true," Miss Jenny affirmed; "I believe amongst all the thousands who take to teaching as a means of livelihood, only about one in ten is fitted for the task. It is as hard to find a common-sensical, well-mannered, well-informed, conscientious, active-minded woman to put in charge of a family of children as it is to find a first-rate practitioner in any other branch of intellectual labour. But when such a woman is found she goes on and prospers. Her voice does not help to swell the complaint of bad pay and ill-usage, for her personal worth and value are acknowledged; the class has come to be spoken of with contemptuous pity because so many helpless, querulous Miss Muddles have betaken themselves to its ranks without the smallest capacity for its duties. It is voted *common* now to send children to a day-school, but I think if there were a return to that old system, middle-class girls would get a much sounder education than they do now under inferior polyglot governesses. It is a craving for cheap gentility which has produced the excessive weedy crop of inefficient teachers whose monotonous

wail in the wind of adversity is so wearisome and distressing to hear. Kitty and I were blessed in the blind guidance of an amiable, fretful lady of this kind, who deplored nothing so much as the degradation of having us to teach; we were fond of her, but when I came to years of understanding, I found that I had to learn and unlearn the very elements of education. It would have been much better for us if we had been taught and knocked about like our brothers."

"Then you agree with me in thinking women in *all* respects the equals of men?" cried Ursula, eagerly rushing on a pet topic of hers. "You would give them the same training, the same chances of public usefulness, the same standing, the same privileges, the same rights, and the same powers?"

"The same *powers*," repeated Miss Jenny, with a suppressed smile playing about the corners of her mouth; "that is an affair of nature, and you will have a difficulty to settle with her about it. No, Miss Ursula, I am not a woman's-rights-woman; and I don't think we are quite so tall

as men; it is of no use tiptoeing or perching on stilts—it only makes our walk ungainly.”

“I am disappointed—I did think I had met with a liberal-minded woman at last!” cried Ursie with visible chagrin.

Miss Jenny laughed and said, “You feel yourself of the average stature of your own sex, Miss Ursula; but confess—don’t you feel intellectually small when you come in contact with really able men?”

“Not a bit of it! and if I did I would never flatter their conceit by acknowledging it,” was the answer. “Do you pay taxes?”

“Yes.”

“Then you have a right to a vote! Do you mean to tell me that you are not as capable of understanding politics as Jemmy Lowndes, the drunken carrier?”

“That is where your woman’s-rights question always lands us!” said Miss Pegge Burnell drily; “we are put in comparison with drunken carriers.”

“I know *you* think it all nonsense, but *we shall see*,” replied Ursie with a significant wag of her head.

"I hope I never shall," said the old lady; "I hope politeness will last my time. When we are equalized, manly courtesy must be abolished, and we shall have to set our own chairs, open our own doors, call our own carriages, carve our own turkeys, fight our own battles and do a hundred and fifty little things which are done for us now. I very much doubt whether the winning of our rights will counterbalance the loss of our privileges."

Ursula declined to look at the question from so low a point of view, and asked Miss Layel abruptly how she liked the income-tax.

"I think it is rather heavy, but it does not press on me as much as it would if I were the wife of a clerk with six babies and only a salary of two hundred a year; if it is to become permanent I wish the wise men in office would regulate it differently. For instance, the head of every household is responsible for the maintenance of its members, and I think he should be allowed a sum of thirty pounds apiece untaxed: if he is a bachelor, living in chambers, with an income of a thousand pounds, he ought to pay on nine

hundred and seventy; but if he is married and supports a wife, eight children and four servants with an income of a thousand pounds, then he ought only to pay on five hundred and eighty."

"You consider that everybody should pay only on the surplus of his income after thirty pounds a head has been deducted for the support of each child and each servant? Well, I declare, your scheme has an air of solidity as well as sense. Men, like curates and clerks, with small means and large families would very properly be exempt or nearly so, and old maids and bachelors and people without encumbrances and responsibilities would pay the more to make up the deficiency. This would not be a tax on either wealth or thrift; and as the riches of a nation are its subjects, no less than its money, it seems hard to make the heaviest pressure on those who have given and who support most members of the State. It is all very fine for Chancellors of the Exchequer to make light of a ten-pound note extracted from the purse of a hard-worked married man. Why, a ten-pound

note represents the shoe-leather of his large little family, or twenty needfuls for his wife! The domestic exchequers and their feminine chancellor-esses ought to get up an agitation meeting on the subject."

"Hear to the politicians in petticoats!" exclaimed Miss Pegge Burnell laughing. "I am sure Jemmy Lowndes could not beat you."

"But we should beat Jemmy Lowndes," retorted Ursula: "*he* is a bachelor and has a bit of property besides his horse and cart, and we would make the tax-collector welcome to three or four sovereigns of his drink money every year."

"Would you go so low as the working-people?" inquired Miss Pegge Burnell. "Oh! you would be root and branch reformers!"

"Assuredly," said Miss Layel; "the single carpenter whose earnings average fifty pounds a year would pay on twenty—he is better off than his friend the married curate whose salary is one hundred and fifty. But if any man is responsible for the keep of an aged relative, that should be taken into his account and allowed for

like a child or a servant. I think my plan would work, and as it is against myself, and others like me, you will admit that it is disinterested."

"Ah, well, men are strong if they are not always wise, and this generation will have meekly to knock under, but the next will profit by our rebellion, depend upon it," said Ursula resignedly. "Let us go back to our original subject, Miss Layel. You have given me a general outline of your governess experience — now let me hear a few particulars: were you well used?"

"Yes. I had my difficulties and annoyances, but can you tell me the life that is without?"

"Were the servants civil and did the children try to wound your feelings?"

"The servants who came in my way were kind enough; children are thoughtless, but I never found one malicious."

"And your employers—were they condescending and patronizing, or distant or disagreeable, or considerate and good?"

Miss Jenny fairly laughed: "I daresay I thought

them each and all by turns, but as we remember each other with genuine liking and respect I suppose we rubbed on together without coming to any expression of antagonistic feeling."

"Then on the whole you consider it a very tolerable life?"

"Yes, if you can have quiet evenings, newspapers and books. Children's society with nothing to vary its monotony is a terrible drag—people who employ governesses should think of it. It takes a great amount of strength out of us and puts nothing in but a sort of weariful patience. If you are not properly supplied with readable matter it is true economy to spend five pounds a year out of your salary in providing for yourself."

"Were you ever kept on short allowance of literature?"

"For six weeks once, on going to a new situation. You cannot imagine how irritable and wretched I felt with nothing to read when the children went to dessert but their little books; but one day at our early dinner, mamma was absent and papa came in to carve the mutton

instead, and by way of making things pleasant, he offered some remark on public affairs, to which I replied snappishly that I knew nothing about anything, I might as well be in Japan, for I had not seen a newspaper since I came into the house. The children stared, papa looked up with amused surprise and I felt hotly that I had forgotten myself, but I was glad of it; for I had *The Times* to my tea regularly ever after and a share all to myself in Mudie's five-guinea box, and the run of the library in the house and half one side of my school-room built up with old reviews and magazines going back into the dark ages of the last century. By standing on a chair with a hassock on it I could just reach the top row, and many a happy Saturday half-holiday have I spent sitting on the floor and marking down good articles to read in the week. I am excessively fond of desultory reading, and I had four years of it in those old mags. rescued from the waste-paper dealer."

"Jenny was always thankful for small mercies', interposed Miss Kitty affectionately. "She makes the best of her governing, but it knocked her

up at last. Ten years of it are enough to sprinkle most women's heads with grey."

"I should think so,—there is nothing romantic or exciting about it assuredly," said Ursula with a half sigh.

"Oh! no, tone yourself down to the temper of a horse in a mill, snatch at every mouthful of hay you can get, love the little ones if you can, have a pet cat if it is allowed, claim leisure evenings and books, and you need not be miserable unless you have a private grief independent of your office."

"Now give me a sketch of the work and of the times and seasons for doing it."

"My general rules were—up at six; piano, seven to eight; prayers and breakfast; lessons, nine to twelve; walk; dinner at one; lessons, two to four; long walk; tea at six; read aloud after it till half-past seven for the bairns; despatch them to dessert, and the rest of the evening to myself."

"That is twelve hours of their company!"

"Yes, but not all work—you must eat and walk as well as they. Take good scrambles

across the country, learn to climb a stone wall, a hurdle or a five-barred gate, and enjoy it as the children do—I always did. Go violetting, nutting—anything! It keeps you in health and spirits. Then be punctual yourself and train the tinies to be the same; they soon find out the comfort of being let alone at play and of not having casual demands made on the odd quarters of an hour which they consider their own. If you can have breakfast and tea in your schoolroom *do*—it makes you independent of household delays and disarrangement for company. I imagine you are one who will not spare yourself to the neglect of your duty, but when you have found out the capacities and dispositions of your children, you will, perhaps, find too that there are calls upon you that you do not anticipate in the way of considerateness and sympathy as well as of authority. They cannot all be ground in one way and turned out in one pattern, and I have seen in many a girl of mine the germs of a holier, wiser woman by far than nature and training have made of me. You'll see it too, Miss Ursula, by the time you have had my experience. And above all let

the children be happy in their own way ; I have a bad opinion of the moral influence of thwarting and disappointing them on principle : sorrow and care are sure to find them out in God's good time, and till then I would let them grow unfretted."

I think Miss Layel's unromantic account of the life of a governess in some measure cooled Ursula's ardour, but just as she was declining in fervour, her prospects opened and she heard, through the medium of Dr. Eden, that after Christmas a governess would be wanted at Erlstone Castle to take charge of the four orphaned grandchildren of the Earl and Countess Calcedon. A communication was opened through the same channel and Ursula was requested to go over for inspection. The result was favourable and she was engaged—her two principal crotchets being allowed on the instant and her salary fixed at one hundred a year. Miss Layel said she ought to esteem herself fortunate, and I believe she was both pleased and proud of the style of her first appointment, though all the remark she made upon it was, "I knew this was what it

would come to from the first—I knew I should have to go out as a governess. I have three months in hand, and them I shall spend in working hard at my Latin.”

VII.

BITTER SWEET.

FOR some weeks past it had been painfully visible to all of us that papa was much less active and cheerful than was his wont. We had been disappointed of letters from the boys at the usual date, and were the more anxious because in their last they had given us anything but flourishing accounts of their success. Ursula's arrangements also weighed on his mind, and for many a long weary hour he would sit by mamma thinking sorrowfully of what he called his children's hard destiny. We trusted, however, that the depression would wear off, until one morning early I awoke to find mamma standing by my bedside. She bade me get up for my father was very ill, and when I followed her into his room, I found

him unconscious, his countenance changed and feebly moaning as if in pain.

I immediately slipped on my clothes, and after waking nurse Bradshaw and Connie, I ran through the still sleeping village for Mr. Peacocke and brought him back with me. Papa had had a slight stroke of paralysis, but the surgeon's remedies were speedily effectual, and before night he had recognized and spoken to us all again. But from that time forth, he was never more able to take his frequent walks in and out of Scarcliffe, though occasionally, when the weather was fine, he went in a Bath chair, attended by mamma and Connie or myself.

No one could be kinder or more constant in his attention during this period of anxiety than was Dr. Julius Eden, who, though not visiting papa professionally, walked up to see him almost daily. Thus he came to be regarded as the friend of the family. Mamma reposed confidence in him, and, if such were any part of his object, he learnt to know Connie in the midst of her home duties and affectionate cares for papa, who did not like to miss her cheerful face from his side during

even one hour of the twenty-four. It was wonderful how she kept up so long and steadily, debarred, as she was, from amusement and exercise for a full month after his seizure; but one afternoon, late in October, I remember her coming into the drawing-room where I was sitting alone by the fire and saying, she felt so tired she thought she could sleep the clock round.

She dropt down on the hearthrug and laying her arm across my knees, rested her head against it and did, in fact, soon nap off completely. I hoped nobody would come in to wake her, but about half an hour afterwards the door opened, and as I looked round to entreat silence, I saw that the intruder was Dr. Julius.

He approached softly and stood a moment or two gazing down at her face with a smile on his own and then said, "You must not let this child overdo herself, Miss Doris; these young things are kept up by excitement, but they have not the *last* in them of more seasoned people;" and then with his long forefinger he stroked the sleepy flush on her cheek, at which her lips purled an inarticulate complaint. I fancied he was going

to speak again, but he thought better of it and just nodding kindly he went his way with as little noise as he had entered.

I had not a doubt left in my mind by this time that Dr. Julius loved our Connie. There had been no sudden falling into the passion, but a gradual strong growth which promised permanence; and Connie, on her part, if not unconsciously, was, at least, unavowedly responsive. But, like the judicious critic who has recently laid it down that it is bad economy to cut the love-making short, Dr. Julius took his time in winning her; he made no vows and claimed none, and appeared perfectly contented with the promise of the future. Ursula alone was impatient of his leisurely wooing.

“Why does he not speak and have done with it?” she unreasonably demanded of me. “People will soon begin to suspect some other motive for his frequent visits beyond mere attention to papa, and it would be agreeable to stop the mouth of gossip with the announcement of a fact. At present we could only say there is nothing between them, though if there be *not* Dr. Julius is as

selfish and unprincipled a man as ever played fast and loose with any girl."

I expressed my own assurance that Dr. Julius was far too good and honourable to do anything of that kind—I would not doubt him.

"You don't think very highly of my judgment, I know," Ursula returned meaningly, "but I have always expected that when it came to the point he would find it no easy matter to dispense with Miss Theodora Bousfield. She never intends to marry him, but she will not like to lose his friendship with its romantic haze of disappointed love. She is growing old, and I can forgive her for wishing to retain his allegiance on the ancient footing; but a young wife would soon undermine it, and that nobody knows better than herself. If she were out of the way I believe he would ask Connie to-morrow."

I cannot say that it had occurred to me to entertain distrust of Miss Theodora's influence, strong and habitual as I knew it to be; I thought her a generous-tempered woman, and so far was she from testifying jealousy of the little one that she seemed to feel in her a true and kindly

interest. As papa recovered sufficiently to allow of our receiving our callers as usual, no one came more often or was more welcome than Miss Theodora. She had made for herself an excuse, and this was, to teach Connie, whose lessons in the accomplishments had been cut short when we left Roseberry, to sing; Connie had a voice sweet and powerful; pure, clear and flexible as a bird's, and the mistress and pupil were mutually delighted with each other. It was pleasant to listen to them, though in Connie's notes I felt there was something wanting of expression.

"Wait awhile," said Miss Theodora; "wait until she has passed through her passionate ordeal; in a girl's fresh tones you never hear the thrill of deep feeling which trembles upon lips that have quivered in the joy and pain of love."

I could accept Miss Theodora as an authority while I hoped that my darling would never learn her passionate power of moving her hearers, if it were only to be bought by undergoing similar experiences.

I can still recal very vividly one afternoon in

the twilight about this time when, mamma being in attendance on papa and Ursula absent at the Dorcas meeting, the two sat singing song after song at the piano, while I, in a mood of lazy enjoyment, enacted the part of audience. In upon this scene, lighted only by the fitful gleams of the fire, stole Dr. Julius and made himself perfectly at home; it was not the first time he had been with us under the same circumstances.

He asked Miss Theodora to sing him a favourite old song, and forthwith her rich voice broke into a love ditty of the Stuart days, written, I think, by Carew; after which Connie was prevailed on shyly to exhibit the progress she had made by singing the following lyric of Thomas Heywood, set to music by Miss Theodora herself:—

“Pack clouds away, and welcome day,
With night we banish sorrow;
Sweet air blow soft, mount lark aloft,
To give my love good-morrow!
Wings from the wind to please her mind,
Notes from the lark I'll borrow.
Bird, prune thy wing, nightingale sing,
To give my love good-morrow!

“Wake from thy nest, robin redbreast,
Sing birds in every furrow,
And from each hill let music shrill
Give my fair love good-morrow !
Blackbirds and thrush in every bush,
Stare, linnet and cock-sparrow,
You pretty elves, amongst yourselves,
Sing my fair love good-morrow !”

“A right joyful incantation !” cried Dr. Julius, and—

“What are you making all this noise about, Connie?” asked Ursula in the doorway. “I do think you might have a *little* more consideration for papa !”

Perceiving who were our visitors she made a sort of half apology, and Connie defended herself from the unkind imputation by explaining that papa liked to hear the music and would have the doors left open for the purpose.

“Very well, please yourself,” returned Ursula, and away she went, her prosaic interruption having effectually dispersed our pleasure.

There was no more singing, and after a little talk, chiefly about poor Jessie, who was still in the infirmary, Dr. Julius said good-night and departed, taking Miss Theodora Bousfield away

with him. When they were gone, Connie remained for ever so long standing on the hearth, looking absently into the red caverns of the fire and quite lost in the mystery of her own thoughts. The sweet innocent face had taken an unusual shade of sadness which I could not interpret, and which, perhaps, would have been just as much of a puzzle to herself; but at length, she became aware that I was watching her, and rousing herself with a little sigh, she said, "I wish Ursula and Dr. Eden had not such a dislike to each other."

"A dislike, Connie!" echoed I in some amaze; "oh! you are mistaken; you know Ursie's way—it means nothing; and why should he dislike her? she does not make any of her teasing speeches to him."

"But he does dislike her, I know," repeated she confidently; "he distrusts and avoids her."

Ursula's reappearance closed the subject. Glancing round the room to see who was there, she remarked cheerfully, "So they are gone at last—that's a happy deliverance! If I were going to stay at home, I can tell you, it would not suit me to see those picturesque friends so often domesticated here. The house is no longer our

own when they are free of it at all times and seasons. You need not look so indignant, Connie; I know *you* would like to take them in to board and lodge; you are all in fool's paradise together, and it really is a pity for a practical person like myself to be obliged to intrude——”

She continued her oration for some minutes longer, but not for Connie's edification—Connie, as she now always did when Ursula was provoking, marched out of the room with her cheeks aflame and her proud young neck up, which symptoms of pique and anger being observed by Ursula, furnished her with a text for another homily, full of unpleasant moralities and innuendoes, which it is not worth while to record.

If Dr. Julius was sufficiently quick-sighted to have discovered the petty, pin-prick annoyances that she inflicted on poor Connie, his dislike was not altogether unfounded. She was a most ingenious tormentor, a complete mistress of the art of worry, and withal so hard, dull or unsympathetic herself that she could laugh and think it only a good jest to have ruffled Connie and made her the victim of a shyness and shame

which would never have come to her of themselves. She considered lovers fair game for sarcasm, and but that a secret jealous spite tipped her arrows with a corrosive power, she might have shot away whole quivers full quite harmlessly. As it was, however, all the sweet Connie might have tasted in her unconfessed love and hope was marred by the infusion of bitter from Ursula's fountains of wisdom and wit, which were continually playing upon her and drenching the cup that Tantalus held to her lip.

I remember when we were alone in our room that night how the honest blood flew into her dear face and the tears into her eyes as she entreated me to remonstrate with Ursula about her paltry persecutions.

"She has no idea how she tortures me," said the poor child vehemently. "I am ashamed to look at Dr. Julius when her cruel speeches flash across my memory. I live in dread that she will some day make one of her double-meaning insinuations before him, and oh! Doris, think what I should feel then! I wish you would let me go to Aberford instead of you!"

Such a desire as this implied that, under Ursula's surveillance, Dr. Julius' company was more pain than pleasure to the little one; it took me too much by surprise, however, to be immediately answered either one way or the other, so I only said we would think about it, and promised, meanwhile, to do my utmost to engage Ursula to lay aside her weapons of offence. But she laughed when I spoke to her, and refused to be dictated to; impugning mamma's care, Connie's sense and my sagacity in her usual manner, and putting us all metaphorically under the feet of her own sonorous principles, wonderful foresight and unimpeachable good judgment; so that at last I found myself wishing Dr. Julius would furnish Connie with armour of proof to turn the points of her arrows by avowing the love that I was sure he felt.

VIII.

AN EVENING PARTY.

MY wishes, however, were of non-effect; Dr. Julius persevered in his leisurely tactics, and papa being utterly opposed to Connie's leaving him at this time, I went away late in November for the promised visit to aunt Maria, and only returned just before Christmas day. The Redcross winter gaieties were then just recommencing, and I found both Ursula and Connie making their preparations for Miss Pegge Burnell's New Year's party—it having been decided by papa, against all opposition, that the little one deserved a treat and a holiday for her excellent conduct as his under nurse, and her unwearied patience and perseverance in reading aloud to him the dry parts of his newspaper.

I should have excused myself from accompany-

ing them on this occasion but for Connie's urgent wish to have my countenance at her first grown-up appearance, since she could not have mamma's.

"Do go, Doris, oh, do go!" she entreated; "I shall not have a scrap of liberty if I am put under Ursie's charge; she won't let me have a chance of enjoyment!" And as the poor little thing was receiving a severe preparatory course of instruction in what she *must* do, and what she *must not* do, and what was *proper*, and what was never *thought* of, I considered that, perhaps, I might be more comfortable to her, as holding less strict views of etiquette, during the delightful hours of a first ball from which Ursula's fluffy precepts were fast sweeping all the bloom.

It would have been quite unnatural, however, notwithstanding all these drawbacks, if she had not looked forward with lively satisfaction and anticipations of enjoyment to the event; she was a thorough girl in her ways and feelings, and a *good dance*, such as Miss Pegge Burnell promised her, was full of charms independent of accessories. On the appointed night, therefore, I donned my eternal black net dress, as Ursula called it, and

took my pretty white bird under my wing with infinite pride and pleasure. I cannot think how it is that everybody does not delight and sympathize in the innocent joy of youth and beauty; Ursula was as cross as two sticks, to use nurse Bradshaw's expression, and but that Connie was in a happy, fluttering state of excitement which lifted her above the reach of small annoyances, she would certainly have been made restless and miserable by the low fire of sharp remarks which rattled about our ears all the way to the Priory. Papa and mamma had contemplated the little one before we set off with serene, affectionate admiration, but nurse Bradshaw's comment, made to me in private, was much more to the point.

"She's the flower of the flock—she'll bear looking at, will Miss Connie, for she's beautiful every bit over!" was the dear old soul's enthusiastic criticism, and it was not less true than enthusiastic. There was no other maiden at Miss Pegge Burnell's that night who could be compared to our Connie for grace and loveliness.

Dr. Julius Eden had arrived before us and was hanging about the doorway on the watch, appa-

rently ; for as soon as we had passed our hostess, he joined us, and for the first time I had the pleasure of seeing him, without any ostensible cause, depart from his usual quiet self-possession. He was good enough twice to answer me at cross-purposes, when Mr. Charles Maurice came up to greet us in his frank young way, which expressed assurance of a welcome, and, without losing a moment, asked Connie to let him have the pleasure of the opening dance with her. Connie, perhaps a little confused too, smiled a kind acquiescence, and, as soon as the band struck up, away they went ; and both of them being very clever with their feet, they had an air of enjoying it extremely.

Ursula would hardly have asked of any other gentleman the question she proposed to Dr. Julius as we sat looking on.

“Are they not a handsome pair?” said she ;
“I never saw two better matched. I hope they will have a valse before they sit down.”

But they did not ; the quadrille over, Connie returned to me, and Dr. Julius, who never paid my presence any more observance than if it were

identical with Connie's, leant over between us and whispered with rapid eagerness,—

“Connie, you are to save all the vales and galops for me;” and the little one positively bent her head and said, “Yes,” as if the demand were a matter of right, and nothing more than she expected and approved.

Ursula had quick ears, and when they presently stood up together, she said with virtuous indignation,—

“Well, that beats everything; I shall tell mamma directly I get home! If Connie does not make herself talked about to-night, I don't know who will!”

But if Dr. Julius had forgotten himself for a moment, he had discretion enough not to make his courtesies obtrusive, and though Connie did not valse or galop with anybody else, she sat out of several of those dances during the course of the evening on the plea of not caring for them, while the doctor kindly took a turn with Miss Theodora Bousfield, Miss Cranmer and other less popular partners. I wished he would invite Ursula, but he never did, and she had much less

dancing, in consequence, than she expected; I was sorry, for crusty as Ursie was and unreasonable too, it always pained me to see her mortified by any slight or inattention, for she was one who took it to heart much more keenly than would have been supposed from other traits of her character.

I received many compliments on Connie's part as I sat on my bench enacting the part of chaperone. Dr. Eden especially was kind.

"That little sister of yours is a dear child, Miss Doris," said he; "you see her good heart in her face."

He disengaged her from his nephew's arm, and carried her in to supper himself, and Dr. Julius, as if determined to keep his attentions in the family as much as possible for this one evening, led me after them. In the gentle commotion of settling into our places, I perceived that Mr. Charles Maurice was manoeuvring himself into Connie's vicinity; somebody else perceived it too, and immediately conjecturing draughts, hustled us off to another quarter, where we were all out of the range of the young collegian's vision.

I suppose I must be rather soft-hearted where lovers are concerned, for I remember wishing there were two Connies—one for Dr. Julius, and one for the ardent youth who was beginning to fancy he should never see heaven elsewhere than in my sister's pretty eyes; and having also an irresistible feeling for the unlucky, I think, if my suffrages had been sought that night for either, they would have been given in favour of the neglected swain, had I not overheard Miss Edith Willoughby rally him by and by on having eaten the supper of a Christian with the strongest muscular tendencies; so that it appeared love had not yet laid hold of his appetite.

It was a pleasant and triumphant evening throughout for Connie, and Ursula's predictions notwithstanding, the harshest remark I heard made on her was, that she was decidedly the prettiest girl in the room. At home the next day also, animadversion was crushed in the bud when Dr. Julius' demand and Connie's acquiescence were named, by papa saying, with peremptory significance,—

“If they agree, who has a right to complain?”

Ursula asked me afterwards if I supposed there was any private understanding and agreement between papa and Dr. Julius with which we younger ones were not yet to be made acquainted? I could not tell; it had not occurred to me before, but such things sometimes were, and it was, therefore, not impossible; in any case, however, I concluded, all the more forcibly for the speculation that had been started, the less we said and the less we meddled now the better.

IX.

STILL WATERS.

DURING the last week of January, Ursula left us to take up her novel post of governess at Erlstone Castle, and, as she said before she went, with an air of pathetic disappointment in reference to Connie and Dr. Julius,—

“There had been no catastrophe!”

There had been no catastrophe, yet Dr. Julius’ visits were still very frequent, and Connie and he were on the best of terms. The idea of an understanding between him and papa had gained ground in my mind, for, I thought, surely papa and mamma would never sanction an intimacy so open and unreserved, unless it were to have the one end of making their darling happy.

That her affections were engaged, deeply and fondly, no one could doubt who knew her as I did; though never a word of question or

confession passed between us on the subject. Here her secretiveness manifested itself; some girls would have felt a necessity for pouring out their hearts to a sister or a friend, but in her reserve there was a sanctity, a purity and humility that sealed her lips even to her nearest and dearest. Yet many a time and oft, at the clashing of the garden door, I have seen her bend her ear to listen whose step was approaching, and I believe she could have distinguished his amongst ten thousand; by the expression of her eyes I could tell instantly whether it was the one step that made her music, or the step of some merely indifferent person. Her childlike frankness, where he was concerned, was fast disappearing, and whenever he came upon her unawares, he was received with a beautiful blush and shy bright smile which told their own tale. She had not lost her happy calm and confidence without a struggle to retain them; I have watched her trying to be brave and easy as in the early days of their acquaintance, but she would soon lose her self-possession, and betray it, by a tripping indecision or breathless hurry of speech.

She was ignorant yet of the power of the passion to which her heart was yielding itself, but in the dawning consciousness of its dominant strength she made her little fight against the love which she knew it was not maidenly to give unasked.

Dr. Julius was not so blind but that he saw these signs of his power, nor so dull but that he knew their interpretation; and what lay in his hands to do for strengthening and perpetuating them, he never abstained from. He had the touch of a fine musician on a delicately responsive instrument, and he had a musician's keen pleasure in the thrilling sweetness of the tones he drew from it. Sometimes it seemed to me that he did not so much love Connie himself as that he wished to win her love—that he was giving less than he desired to appropriate—and I admit that it would occasionally have enhanced my satisfaction could I have seen him less master both of himself and her.

Mr. Charles Maurice had left Redcross again, and I was not sorry the young man should be out of the way. There was no chance for him whatever; so it relieved me that he had courage

to quit his flame instead of lingering about it, *thinking* himself into a hopeless passion and coming to himself again, at last, with scorched wings and a sore heart. The only hint we ever had of how he would have liked our Connie came to me through his kind mother.

One evening, long after, looking at her with a smile of wistful regret, she said,—

“Charlie was a good fellow—he would have spent his life to make her happy, if she only could have thought so;” and, perhaps, I felt sorry *then* that it was Dr. Julius and not Charlie whom she loved. They would have been more equal.

Now that Ursula was gone we all had peace within and without. Nobody uttered warnings or became dolefully prophetic on tender topics. Dr. Julius was at his ease; he came and went as he liked without being gainsayed or inhospitably hinted at. He brought Connie books and talked them over with her when she had read them; he brought her songs and came again to hear her sing them; he sent her on errands over the down to little Jessie who was so far on the

way to recovery that she had been allowed to return home to her father and twin-brothers, and met her to receive her report as she came back. He had taken to himself the privilege of calling her always "Connie" and "my dear child," without ceremonious prefix, but he deferred asking for his *right* to do so. I am not sure that I was satisfied—I was not so reliant and confiding as the little one, but then *I* was not in love. But papa and mamma were serene and comfortable, and nurse Bradshaw, though she did once insinuate that "the young gentleman up at the Rectory would have been more suitable," seemed to consider the other aspirant with shrewd favour; if she had not done so, we should all have heard of it without a single twirl of circumlocution or one complimentary figure of speech.

Miss Pegge Burnell, once when I saw her alone, became curious and confidential, but I had Connie's pride to consider and would admit nothing, upon which the old lady said,—

"We have none of us learnt to look on Dr. Julius Eden as a man at all likely to marry,

but if I had to choose a mate for the pretty one, I would choose him. Charlie Maurice is a clever, ingenuous, amiable fellow, but, regarded in the light of a husband, he will be better for having the ripeness of half a dozen more years over his head. Connie can afford to wait until the right man comes; she must never marry but for true love—bonnie, sensitive, enthusiastic little soul that she is! We shall see—I *know* Dr. Julius likes her.”

I put that off by asking, “Who did not like her?” and was answered conclusively that she was everybody’s favourite; and speculation being thus dammed up at the fountain head, we were not teased by streams of sly insinuation, or drops of hints or jets of interrogation on a theme which, whatever its issue, was still, and ought to remain, entirely private from our friends, until Dr. Julius Eden had spoken. I detest premature gossip and floods of idle words from idle people on anything so serious as the love that may prove the happiness or the misery of two lives; and regarding Connie’s, I was thankful both now and afterwards that I had succeeded in effectually

discouraging careless chatter; it was all the more easy to do it because Dr. Julius was generally considered a vowed bachelor for Miss Theodora Bousfield's sake, and otherwise, perhaps, not in a position to marry while his uncle lived, unless the old physician would retire from practice in his favour.

When Ursula, therefore, by and by asked me in a private letter, "What do people say about Dr. Julius and our Connie?" I was able to reply with strict truth, "Nobody says anything but yourself."

X.

AT ABERFORD.

THE early spring passed over almost unmarked, except by the delayed letters from the boys which brought us more hopeful tidings than any we had hitherto received; there were Ursula's family epistles too, always written on a Saturday half-holiday and never containing anything but cheerful intelligence. The children were noisy and untractable, but she could manage them; the task of teaching was tedious and laborious, but she did not mind work; the Earl and Countess manifested their entire satisfaction by every civility and numerous gifts. Altogether, as nurse Bradshaw phrased it, she appeared, at last, to have reached "the courts of praise," where her valuable qualities were appreciated and acknowledged.

Since her departure for Erldstone there had been

no more opportunity for Mr. Westmore to pay his visits as her master, and he ceased, for a time, to come to our house at all; but as spring advanced and the warm days encouraged papa to go out occasionally in his Bath chair, we met him, now and then, on the Scarccliffe road. He told us that he was much occupied with his pupils, but on papa's saying he should be glad to see him if he would stop some evening on his way home and drink tea with us, he, to my surprise, acceded; and the next day but one he fulfilled his promise.

It happened the same night that Dr. Julius Eden had strolled up, as he often did, between his dinner and dusk, so the two met, and a very few words served to reintroduce them as men once of the same public school. At first, the pleasure seemed great and mutual, but by and by Mr. Westmore flagged; he became absent and nervous, and finally went off in haste, scarcely apologizing for his abrupt movements.

There was something about that man which touched me with an inexpressible pain and pity; even had I not known his history, I should still

have known that he had suffered tortures of shame, disappointment and servitude such as rust into the very soul, eating out all noble ardour and ambition. He had a passive fortitude and a stubborn endurance, but there remained in him no hard courage to beat off calamity or wrestle against wrong.

I did not see him again until I went to Aberford in May; but while I was there, poor Edith, who had been long wearing away imperceptibly, began to sink fast; and the medical man under whose guidance aunt Maria acted, told her that she was not long for this world. It fell to my lot to write and summon her mother and brother, and while the wan mother watched over her daughter's last days, it fell to my lot also to keep Mr. Westmore company—to sit with him in the dull little parlour or walk with him by the slow sedgy river, or through the level, marshy meadows, now green and daisy-strewn with spring.

I cannot remember now how it came about, but one weary wet day when it was impossible to cross the threshold of the door, from other

things we presently fell to talking of his father, and I asked if the chance of his memory being set right with the world was gone by for ever.

"Yes—he is dead," was the quiet answer; "he is dead, and has done with suffering man's cruel injustice."

"But you are left—you who have maybe a long life before you," I ventured to say.

"True—yet I have existed so long in the shadow of dishonour, have lost so much by it and hope so little from its removal, that were there a chance of emerging from it, it would seem hardly worth while to fret my mother's mind with the effort. She is still now, but her sorrow has been beyond all words. As for me—I came into disgrace as an inheritance, and the years buried between then and now have worn me down to the level of it."

I felt a pang of almost indignant regret at the sight of such a man acquiescing in such a fate. It seemed to me as if, believing his father's innocence, he should have maintained it before the world and against the world with all his powers

of defiance. Yet—how was I to judge? Earlier in life or later, he might have been wrecked less fatally, perhaps; earlier, disaster would have led him into some humbler way through the world; later, his individual character would have established his position and he might have weathered the storm; but from its very threshold he had been driven back in shame and discouragement, and all his days since had been a series of petty fights against mean persecution and a biting poverty, until the world, its honours, its praise and its blame were all become equally indifferent to him.

It is easy to fancy we could have shown a bolder front to that adversity—it always is easier to fight, in imagination, other people's battles than our own, because we stand aloof spectators, while they are struggling for dear life in the heat and smoke and dust; blinded by passion or mazed by fear, until they rush into the very thick of danger and die, or draw off maimed and beaten, to see too late where they threw away an advantage or wantonly dared a mortal blow.

Another day, Mr. Westmore having walked

over to Sandford on some errand for aunt Maria, returned in a curious tumult of spirits and told his mother that he had met his once warmest friend, school-fellow and college associate—Mr. Francis Churton. The following morning that gentleman called, and they spent several hours together; and it was the same evening, that after sitting some time in a mood of dreamy reflectiveness, with his face bent over a bowl of freshly cut flowers, he looked up at me suddenly and asked if I had ever experienced the enthusiasm of youthful friendship. I replied in the negative, adding that enthusiasm was not much in my way.

“Then you have missed one set of happy sensations,” said he and returned to the enjoyment of his flowers.

His mother was present, having just been relieved in the sick room by aunt Maria, and she now began to make some inquiries about the visitor of the morning, adding in an explanatory aside to me, “They were a modern Damon and Pythias, my son and Francis Churton.”

“Mother, what do you suppose Francis is

going to exchange Oxford for?" he asked abruptly.

"My son, how should I guess? He used to have—both of you had—noble aspirations."

"He is going out to India as an itinerating missionary priest."

"In earnest, Paul?"

"You are surprised, mother; now Miss Fletcher looks approving. Let me hear your views on the subject of a man leaving luxury, ease, honours and learning at home for such service as missionary service in India is?"

"I have no views—but it strikes me on the instant that your friend is *right*."

"You have a turn for hero-worship—he is right. He has a conviction that he was designed for the work, and he is going to give the world an example of a man acting up to his conviction at a personal cost which very few are able to estimate."

"Paul, there is something more! Tell me—he wants you to go with him?" cried Mrs. Westmore in eager alarm.

"Yes."

“But you will not go—oh, Paul! how could I spare you?” and his mother’s voice trembled with tears.

“I told him I had my duty nearer home—besides, I am not the stuff heroes are made of,” said he half bitterly.

“My dear son, you might strive *here*—tell him, Miss Fletcher, that it is a shame to lie so long inactive,” cried his mother, appealing to me.

“It is,” said I—“it is a shame for any to lie inactive while there are so many battles to fight against Bigotry, Cant and Misrule, for which God has given him the weapons; you let them rust.”

“What do you mean?” he asked, glancing inquiringly at his mother, then at me.

“I mean that I have been reading some of your essays, and that you were not endowed with your awful sarcasm for nothing—that when genius has gifted you with second-sight into men’s motives and the causes and consequences of human folly and misery, you have no right to close your eyes and spend your life in a dream.”

He only sighed, looked at the flowers, and said nothing.

"Even *now* it is not too late," his mother murmured. "He might rise above circumstances and win success yet."

"You women speak of struggle and success as if in them only lay true greatness. But is it so?" he said gravely. "Struggle needs some coarseness of temper; success argues energy, obtrusiveness or skilful guile—qualities essential to the man of action, but to the theorist non-essential. The real value of work is not in its reward, but in the work itself. What you want me to win is fame, lip-honour, and their tangible results—things that have ceased to have any temptation for me. I coveted them once, as all young and hopeful men do, but I covet them no longer. I have made the best of my life, such as it was allotted me."

"But what profit is there in all your labours, Paul?"

"Let me answer you like a Christian philosopher, mother—there is food and raiment, with which we are both content."

"But that needful good begins and ends at home—will none of your efforts ever go beyond?"

"That must be as Providence disposes. If my work is worth aught it will have its day and its influence in God's own time."

"Oh, Paul! but I may never see it—I may never see you other than you are—obscure, poor, despised."

"Mammy darling, don't disquiet thyself—what care I for those familiar foes? living between you and my books they never vex me."

He rose and went over to his mother's chair, lifted up her face and kissed her. Well—they had not *all* against them, since fate had left them love!

I think I almost sympathized with him then; though he was inactive *now*, he had once done what he could; his circumstances and character were both exceptional. Evil fortune had early got him prisoner in her barred and bolted cells; perhaps he was wisest to tame his mice, and pet his spiders and nurse his fancies, and dream his dreams; never, though he beat himself to pieces with vain rage, could he throw down one

stone of those prison walls, or draw out of its ward one bolt of those prison bars.

Edith still lingering, Mr. Westmore returned to Scarcliffe to fulfil his duties, and his mother being left behind, a sincere liking and intimacy grew up between us. She was a good woman, but misfortune had coloured all her ideas, and while *wishing* for her son's advancement, she had clearly no *hope* of it. When we were together she spoke of nothing else, and I soon found that the shrinking sensitiveness and reserve which had kept him out of the public strife, where he must have risked contumely and humiliation often, were as strong in her own breast as his—he inherited them from her.

He was absent when poor Edith died—died and made no sign. She passed away in a lethargy, without suffering, but also without brightening, and so that thread of this tangled web of life was spun and severed. Her brother returned for the funeral, and immediately afterwards they went back to their cottage, in the hollow of the down, Mrs. Westmore having exacted a promise that I would see her when I was at home whenever I could walk so far.

I am writing now by the light of memory and the old Thought-Book, and about this date I find in the yellow leaves a lame dissertation upon friendship, arising out of the acquaintance I had made with Mr. Westmore. Very crude are the thoughts, very limping the conclusions; wisdom of inexperience which evolves all things out of its moral consciousness, and produces figments which greybeard philosophy explodes with peals of laughter, or floods with foolish tears.

By other entries I find Ursula, especially, rallying me through those first midsummer holidays of hers on what she was pleased to call, a decided improvement in my social dispositions. I detect a change myself, though probably *then* I was but little conscious of it. I had found a friend to my liking—a friend, moreover, to whom I fancied I could do good, and so insensibly a warmer atmosphere suffused my life. Do not anticipate any mature folly—I said, a *friend*; Mr. Westmore was that only.

I have seen the same exhilaration pervading other tempers for a much slighter cause: a scribbler beginning a new story, an artist contem-

plating a blank canvas with the picture in his mind's eye; Ursula herself with a freshly stretched bit of tapestry work before her, would have such an access of wholesome cheerfulness. We cannot bear up long in a high flight of sentiment, but in common life there are many little spurs which help us over the heavy ground with an agreeable vivacity; nature having constituted most of us with a tendency to enjoy the days of small things, which are the interludes between the few great events which Providence allots to every soul of us.

I know not how I could tell this story and leave out that short, pleasant episode of friendship, so I must be forgiven, if now, with the fuller account of Connie and her trials, I mingle in a few threads of my own life, even though they be faint in colour and slight in texture.

XI.

A FRIEND.

IN fulfilment of my promise, a few days after my return from Aberford, I set out to pay Mrs. Westmore a visit. It was one of those lovely June mornings of the poets when the sky is a stainless canopy of blue, and the sun shines through an atmosphere without glare or sultriness.

It being holiday time, Mr. Westmore was at home, and from the scattering of papers on the floor and table around him, apparently engaged in winnowing the grain from the chaff of his literary garner. I had brought with me a certain little roll of manuscripts to be returned to its owner, consisting of a group of historic studies which had been lent to me to read by my own request. As I produced and laid it on the table,

he looked up and said, "Well?" interrogatively.

"I like them very much," said I; "if you had tried those with the publishers instead of the Utopian theories, you would have found name and success long since."

"The series is only just accomplished; it has been a labour of love with me for twelve years;" replied he, opening the roll and smoothing the leaves on the table before him. "I have the keenest pleasure in this analysis of mixed characters, and yet a death's head perches on my pen often and paralyzes it."

"Are you afraid that an ignorant critic may demolish all your labours with a column of derisive comment?"

"No! When our heart is in our work no fear of critics, wise or foolish, is before our eyes. It is a doubt whether I may not have falsified a whole life by misconceiving the motives which produced one or two remarkable acts."

"Some of your views are at variance with all I have ever read before. You are very charitable; if there can be two springs sug-

gested as the cause of any line of conduct you invariably choose the nobler; you shrink from imputing mean and base motives."

"Does that strike you as weak? I am often embarrassed and undecided in my own mind even when I have wound up all my arguments as neatly as possible upon paper; for the more narrowly I investigate the evidence on disputed characters the more inconsistent do they commonly become."

"I like your studies of Wolsey, Bacon and Raleigh—I like to hear of misjudged men and women being restored to wholesome reputation, but there are others, abhorred from childhood, whom I would rather continue to believe were what old historians painted them. For instance—nobody shall convince me that Bloody Mary was not cruel, and even Cromwell's letters and speeches, backed by all Mr. Carlyle's eloquence, cannot rub out of my memory the long prejudice I was taught to feel against his pious hypocrisy."

"Treason, treason!" cried Mr. Westmore. "Women are less mischievously employed in dealing with fictitious than historical personages, for the last thing to be expected from them is

justice. They are partizans or they are nothing. Though themselves crafty, they cannot apprehend mixed motives or disentangle complicated trains of action. They start from the simple principle that what a man *wills* he can do, and what he *does* is the result of an individual, untrammelled purpose. They do not see the manifold necessities, interests, difficulties, dangers, uncertainties, distortions, contradictions that compass him about. They never see all round a character, so to speak—a fanatic they can understand, but a many-sided man is to them a puzzle or a dissembler.”

“I will admit that women do not make good historians, but I deny that they are more crafty or more deficient in the sense of justice than yourselves,” said I; “the worst that ought to be said against us is, that we allow merciful feeling to have the casting voice when judgment ought to speak last.”

“I think women are naturally despotic and less merciful than men,” returned Mr. Westmore with the utmost coolness.

“That is a bit of one of his theories, Miss Fletcher,” interposed his mother; “it does not

harmonize with his practical benevolence at all."

I thought, having exchanged incivilities, we had better go back to the starting point, so I asked if he would try to find a publisher for the historic sketches. He said he would think about it.

"And he will do nothing else but *think*, my dear, unless you keep on urging him," added Mrs. Westmore sighing. "He has been *thinking* these dozen years, but when will he be *doing*."

"Very soon, perhaps; I shall remember that a mouse once nibbled the way for a lion out of a net, and I shall persevere until I have broken it mesh by mesh," said I, rising to go away.

Mr. Westmore would accompany me part of the way, and when we reached the high level of the down, whither we had mounted almost in silence, he reverted to the old topic.

"I thank you for your encouragement, and ten years ago it would have been beyond all price," said he; "*now* the elasticity that would have risen to it is gone. You and my mother must prevail on yourselves to believe that I am grafted for life into my no position. Habits of

solitude and study overgrow our active propensities, and I assure you it would cost me a painful effort to exchange that dim little cottage book-room of mine, with my mother in her couch corner by the window, for the life of cities and society which most men thrive in as a natural element. Long ago I suffered one rough transplantation, and I am not disposed to bear another. I cannot make a fresh start at my years; besides, I see no opening. Leave me my books and my senses unobscured, and I shall travel peacefully down into the valley of old age, doing the drudgery that earns our bread as contentedly as most of my fellow-creatures."

"You were made for better things."

"If I were, then should I have done them," was his answer; "whatever the design of our being, we fulfil it; perhaps mine was quite other than you fancy: so far, I illustrate nothing but the fact that the visible life is full of injustices that reason cannot explain, but you must not think I have been without my compensations."

"You have suffered more wrong and disappointment than any man I know."

“Your acquaintance then is not wide; there are thousands more miserable if less avowedly unfortunate than myself. I grant that I have had my portion of bitterness, that I have lost many things sweeter than life itself; but when we gave up the unequal strife with poverty, meanly aggravated by the stigma of a name disgraced, and, leaving dark memories behind, hid ourselves in remote country seclusion, we tasted of peace again. There’s nothing ignoble in our quiet home, Miss Fletcher, now—nothing to wear a man’s soul out with unavailing fret and weariness. The world is a long way off—all the echoes that come into the hollow are softened. In the day I drudge, at night I am king of my own thoughts, and they carry me beyond the reach of care; or when I have a fit of moodiness and misery, I dig in my cabbage garden, and dream of the great men unfortunate who have done likewise in the old days. There is wonderful consolation in mother earth, even before she takes us to her breast for the last sleep. You have no conception, probably, how much beguilement for tedious care there lies in trenches for peas and early potatoes

I do not believe you have ever given an eye to mine, or even to the brilliance of my flower garden of twenty feet square."

"I will inspect both the next time I visit Mrs. Westmore."

"And I have loftier relaxations: this which I survey is my kingdom. It costs me nothing, but I enjoy it—sea, sky, down, valley. I can speculate over a bit of chalk, or a tuft of weeds, or a creeping thing on a sunny bank by the half-hour together."

"You are a minute philosopher."

"The world is wide, but I have an epitome of it at my own door. Think better of me than you did; for hapless folk who have a vulnerable chink in their armour close over a very sensitive and vital part, I recommend refraining from open contest and the betaking of themselves to quiet study and a cabbage garden. With God, and nature, and a conscience clean as may be of hard deeds, no man need fret his soul in permanent wretchedness. I have done repining; I have no great *present* evil to bear—the obscurity and poverty which you regard as evils are not really so."

“Do you mean then that in the face of a *new* calamity, your philosophy would not suffice—study and the cabbage garden that is?”

“Rochefoucault says, ‘La philosophie triomphe aisément des maux passés et des maux à venir; mais les maux présents triomphent d’elle.’ In effect, suffering when young is strong and gets the better of philosophy; but as suffering ages and grows feeble, philosophy resumes her reign—philosophy here being but another name for ceasing to mourn. I know no calamity now that could much affect me but the loss of my mother or of one of my faculties.”

“And is the range of your hopes no wider?”

“I should like to see Frank come home—it would comfort my mother; personal hopes I have none, and there are certain faces of once friends that I should like to see again, but probably never shall; or if I saw them, they would be no longer the same.”

He became silent and absent after this, and I left him to what I saw was a painful memory still, whatever he might try to think; perhaps he was self-deceived on some points, and more

regret and more hope lurked in his heart yet than he knew or would acknowledge. We are all so ready to say we have done with Hope, but I believe, though it puts on various faces and various garbs, it never *really* leaves us until we come to the world unseen and Fruition takes us by the hand instead.

XII.

MISS JENNY LAYEL.

URSULA chose to resume her Latin lessons during her holidays, which brought Mr. Westmore again at stated intervals to our house. Though she disapproved of our intimacy she did not much discourage it, and only grew a little scornful when she saw me reading the lengthy documents lent me for that purpose. He had been prevailed on to send the *Historic Studies* to a publisher, and for about a fortnight a cheerfulness springing out of revived hope animated him visibly; but at the end of that time, great was my disappointment and dismay when he put into my hands the returned manuscript, and a note from the bookseller declining them, on the plea of his being an unknown writer, unless he would print at his own risk. "And that is quite out of the

question," said he. And there the matter, for the present, dropt.

Soon after this, calling on Miss Pegge Burnell alone one quiet, sunny afternoon, I found her just coming out of the Priory door leaning on the arm of her maid, both of them ready for a walk. She immediately asked if I would go with her to see Miss Layel, to which I acceded.

"I have got an article for her in her favourite review; it is very ill-natured, but I daresay she will like to read it," said the old lady; "Harris, give me the paper, and you need not come now; I shall do very well with Miss Fletcher's assistance;" and we bent our steps slowly across the park in the direction of the little cottage where the sisters lived.

On the way I ventured to ask what special interest Miss Layel had in the review which we were carrying to her, and received, with some surprise, a communication to the effect that she was a person who wrote books. I should never have suspected her of anything of the kind, for she was a very unpretentious, insignificant little body to look at, and I had somewhere

imbibed a notion that authoresses gave themselves airs of eccentricity, though to be sure I had never seen one to verify the idea. But when duly primed with the information Miss Pegge Burnell gave, I prepared to observe her more narrowly than I had yet done, in the hope of discovering some of the traits popularly attributed to her order; but I may as well record my disappointment at once:—there was nothing whatever in her manner or appearance to call for the slightest animadversion.

She was on her knees on the grass-plot before the cottage, putting some geranium cuttings close round the inner edges of several flower-pots, with an animal lying beside her which at the first glance looked like a little white lion, but turned out on closer inspection to be only a cat of some foreign breed with a bushy tail like a fox, long hair and a curly ruff. Miss Pegge Burnell paid her respects to him when she had shaken hands with his mistress, and he appeared to have a perfect sense of the courtesy.

“Finish your cuttings—Miss Fletcher and I will go and sit down in the parlour until you

can come to us," said Miss Pegge Burnell, and as Miss Layel replied that she wished we would, she would not keep us waiting more than five minutes while she lifted her flower-pots somewhere into the shade, we entered the cottage; my companion remarking to me in a gratified tone that it used to be a most doleful little place, but that the Layels had converted it quite into a ladies' home.

We seated ourselves near the open window, from which there was a very pretty view, and the old lady, glancing over the round table, which was strewn with books and needlework, espied another copy of the review she had come up to communicate, and when Miss Layel appeared she pointed to it and said, "I see somebody else has sent you what I had made it my mission this afternoon to bring."

"Oh, yes, thank you! I have had a fresh one every morning by post for my breakfast since last Saturday, when it was published, and two letters of kind condolence about it besides," replied Miss Layel, with a mixture of fun and pathos. "My friends have a much quicker sympathy

with my ill-luck than my good-luck; four people have sent me that injurious review, but I have only had a single copy of the paper which I esteem second best, and which strokes me down the right way, and that came from my publisher."

"I do not think this so *very* bad if you consider the leaven of superciliousness that permeates the whole thing," said Miss Pegge Burnell with conciliatory intentions.

"Don't you? I think it damning with faint praise."

"It is of no use to be vexed, child; I daresay your critics give you a hint now and then that helps you?"

"Not they! They only confuse and worry me with their endless contradictions. This very paper said at my beginning that I wrote in a manly, vigorous style, and they have reduced me now to the mean rank of possessing only an acquired air of sense and prettiness. I chose it for my guide, philosopher and friend, because it seemed to me the noblest and most scholarly in tone, and you perceive where a diligent study of its principles of criticism has landed me. It has

kept me in a frame of profound humility until it has emasculated my English, and now it derides me. I think I shall go out and teach *a b c* again. Come in, Tricksy."

This was addressed to the little white lion, which, having shaken the door handle for some moments, had now shaken it open and insinuated one paw; his whole fussy person followed, and making straight for his mistress's lap, he sat up there and stared me almost out of countenance, the demure scamp! I had had my eye on him in the garden during the foregoing conversation and had seen him deliberately, stealthily and enjoyingly upset two of those pots of cuttings which were now lying in the scattered mould on the garden walk. Miss Layel, unaware of his delinquencies, forgot the critics while she petted the cat, and called on me for my admiration of his grace and sensible expression, which I could conscientiously give, for he was certainly the finest creature of the kind I had ever seen. She appeared much pleased, and gave me several sprightly little anecdotes of his intelligence and affection before she reverted to the previous subject,

which, however, she did by and by, saying in an aggrieved tone, "You know, Miss Pegge Burnell, my stories are not of a kind to be taken in combination with cigars—in fact, they are not men's books at all—but I cannot insert a notice to that effect by way of preface, can I?"

"I do not see why you should not if you consider it desirable; but I remember once meeting with a volume called on the title-page 'A Woman's Book,' and I must confess I read no further," replied Miss Pegge Burnell.

"That would not suit me; I want my stories to be read, though when I see such an account of them as this, I feel all over on fire with shame and self-contempt. They are by no means so mechanically composed as my critic would make it appear. I have a pleasure in writing them quite independent of pay-day, though I like the money when it comes, for I have my own bread and butter to earn; but I can't go on for ever, so his sense of justice must be gratified, if he calculates the chances I have of repenting my fictitious sins in the dust and ashes of poverty, if I live to grow old."

"I suppose you took up writing when your health failed you over governessing?" said Miss Pegge Burnell.

"No, I did not; I always liked making out stories. I don't know whether you can take it up unless you have some little natural gift. Now, Kitty is fifty times better, wiser and cleverer than I am, but she cannot put a story together; she cannot even give in writing a lively account of things she has seen or make a good epitome of a heavy biography she has read—she has not the knack, but she is conversable on all sorts of people and events and is a far better companion than ever I was. Circumstances imperiously order me to live by my wits as decently as may be, and though I have only minor talent, my bump of concentrativeness makes the best of it, and luckily I am not tortured by mean spites and jealousies against my betters. All the same, Miss Pegge Burnell, I should like to have been a genius—a genius with a grand Oxford education!"

"Like your reviewers—and what should you have done if you had, my dear?" asked Miss Pegge Burnell, laughing at the flash of vehemence

which accompanied Miss Layel's expression of her futile regrets.

The little body was not prepared to say, so she subsided into caressing the white lion, presently, however, observing in a quiet, reflective tone,—

“The real question is—are men and women justified in writing at all who are perfectly aware that they do not possess the best and highest gifts? Ought it to be a point of conscience with me to burn my pen, since I have found out that I never can reach within many, many spans of the standard of good criticism?”

“I should say *not*, while there are imperfect readers for you to please.”

“Here is another puzzle—is it wisest to aim high and fail, or to seek out our natural level and stature and not strain beyond it? Most of us, I think, are ambitious when we have the flush of youth on us, but as cool criticism reduces that fever of self-ignorance, it commonly reduces the spasmodic eagerness to fly which has brought us to grievous humiliation in the mire before. Now I am distinctly aware that I was born to *walk*; my critic, there, has helped me to the knowledge,

and I'm much obliged to him. I recollect reading some years ago the *Life of Haydon*, the painter. He was a man whose powers by nature and birthright were manifestly weaker than his ambition or his vanity—he was for ever trying to soar and for ever failing—God had not given him wings. That book was like a series of ice-baths to me.”

“It is a book full of heart-aches, my dear; I would have all vain aspirants to fame read and digest it; many a one may find worldly salvation there and a cure for the greediest evil in the heart of self-ignorance,” said Miss Pegge Burnell. “But don’t be so solemn—it is not necessary to plunge into spiritual metaphysics to console yourself for a crusty review, is it?”

“No—I suppose it is not, and instead I shall take into account the exigences of periodical writing. A lady novelist, like myself, affords a small opportunity for fun more or less malicious, satirical or harmless; she is fair game I allow, and when the fun is not at my own expense it is very amusing reading. I only protest against being depreciated as writing for the means of

support; Dr. Johnson thought it ought to be the first object of authors, did he not? Reviewers live by their pens, yet no one accuses them of trading on their critical faculties, and using them from low motives of making money."

"These men are full of learning and riches, taste and muscular Christianity, good blood and self-esteem, and they ought to be more generous!" cried Miss Pegge Burnell. "But I know the one who does the tea-and-toast articles on the social moralities in general, writes often and often against the grain, and has the utmost difficulty in spinning his inch of yarn into an ell of stuff. And he writes for feminine readers as obviously quite, my dear, and in quite as manufacturing a way, as any poor young woman who does little family histories for popular magazines. Occasionally I have suspected a lady-pen in his series, especially when there was anything very ill-natured about the sex—but perhaps I was mistaken. Men can say very stinging things when they give their minds to it, though it is hard to beat the incisive power of a woman's tongue when she has a fit of spite."

"I cannot help feeling that my lucubrations are mild after most of my contemporaries," said Miss Layel; "but there are people who like little vignettes in water-colours better than high art productions."

"Certainly, my dear, I do myself when my wits are weak with suffering, as they often are. Come, cheer up; I will not have you discouraged; you cannot go back to teach young Turks again, and you are earning very comfortable bread and butter."

"With plenty of pepper to it," replied Miss Layel, laughing.

"Never mind; it takes off the insipidity. You will soon get over the reviewers. Tricksy will comfort you."

At the sound of his name the white lion, who, to my great relief, had dozed off, opened his eyes, looked up at his mistress, and began to sing like a chorus of tea-kettles, while she tickled his chin. Miss Pegge Burnell and I left them thus employed, and about a week afterwards, passing by the cottage, I was glad to see Miss Layel at work in her garden with the fussy little white

lion beside her, as usual. She looked very cheerful, called my attention to a remarkably handsome fuchsia, and seemed quite to have "got over the reviewers."

During the interim I had procured from Mr. Simeon Moore's Circulating Library several of her works to read, and had compared them with her critic's depreciatory remarks. He had an air of trying to be just, but he only succeeded in being injurious; and there were a few lines of smooth incivility, which a gentleman of his wit might have afforded to dispense with; personality is a weapon any hack can wield. Also, if a bit of retort criticism may be indulged in, I could have wished that he had less frequently pointed his phrases with texts and turns of Scriptures; which Dr. Johnson says is "a mode of merriment which a good man dreads for its profaneness, and a witty man disdains for its easiness and vulgarity."

The stories were simple and easy reading, and not without thought; men, very wise and very experienced, might despise their tepid philosophy, but it chimed in with my quiet taste. I never

admire screaming effects, or exaggerations of sensibility, or noisy ebullitions of passion; I believe myself that feeling is commonly calm in proportion to its strength. Children roar over their griefs, and take all their little world into their confidence; youths and girls wear their tragical sorrows outside, often to the deep affliction of their relatives; but men and women who are really such in power as well as years, draw down the blinds over the windows of the heart where there is mourning within.

No; I do not take spasms to be a sign of strength either in the body or the spirit; deep feeling possesses itself in quiet; it knows there is no need of bitter outcries to enhance the effect of a tragedy of life and death; but loud, sham sentiment evaporates at the tongue and eyes. If, of two persons professing attachment to me, one lives by me quietly, loving and trusting, bearing and forbearing, and the other worries my heart out with daily fret, suspicion, and exaction, I believe in the affection of the first; the last is mere froth of selfishness under a false name, and I do not believe in it one bit, though it protest,

and promise, and vow, and make me miserable from morning to night. And as with affection, so with sorrow. If I see any one boisterous in grief, weeping in floods, moaning and groaning lamentably, I make myself resigned; I know all violent sensations are intermittent, and that they drop into sudden exhaustion and complete calm, during which nature knits up her strained links again, and puts the machine back into working order. But when I see a quiet face, dry eyes, mute lips that refuse to complain, and a tendency to creep away into solitude and darkness, like a wounded animal, I suspect that the main-spring is broken, and that, very possibly, the sufferer may die of it.

I found Miss Layel held similar views, and indicated, rather than exposed, the terrible agonies that thrill strong hearts, such as suffer and are still. Possibly she might have seen vehement passions at work, close at hand, in domestic familiarity, and for long together, and being unable to represent them in their power, had refrained her pen from their ugliness; or she might have found out by experience that phrases

do not express the passionate throes of pain in which the heart writhes itself out of the life of despair into the life of peace; I remember once hearing her remark, in reference to a certain wild scene of jealousy in a famous novel, that it was no more like the truth than the description of a surgical operation in its effect on our nerves is like the sensations of the patient under the operator's knife, and I imagine she was right.

Reading her little stories gave me a suggestion for Mr. Westmore; without mentioning his name or betraying any confidence, I thought I would ask her what sort of people were her publishers, and whether they printed anything but novels. This I did, and got for answer that they were the very best people in the world and printed everything.

"Jenny's dealings are all with the very best people in the world, Miss Fletcher," added Miss Kitty, who happened to be present; "if ever you are in want of a character refer to Jenny. Her publishers are very honourable men of business, but their charity is *not* all embracive; for I myself, incited by my partial sister, once offered

them a beautiful moral essay, and they would not have it at a gift; so if you are going to send them anything on your own account, don't *quite* depend on their taking your estimate of it."

"Kitty always *will* fancy herself more worldly-wise than myself," said Miss Layel, "because she holds worse opinions of people."

"Much truer opinions: now I believe in rogues—she does not; she is always for giving everybody one more chance; if it were not for me, she would never do poetical justice on the characters in her novels even. There was an odious young woman in one whom I wanted to have put out of the way, but she let her off with growing preposterously stout."

"From my youth upwards I have always regarded fat as one of the greatest evils to which flesh is heir; we had a rich uncle and aunt, who were very fat, both of them, and very asthmatical, and very cross, and very stingy, and very miserable."

"But I am sure, lean wickedness is more orthodox; villains should be dark, wiry, and hollow-eyed."

“You are describing *me*, Kitty,” interposed Miss Layel, pathetically; “and that is too bad. But I want to know, Miss Fletcher, if you have any personal object in asking about my publishers?”

I told her, no; I only wanted information for a friend; on which she said they were every way to be depended on, and had always used her courteously. The next time I saw Mr. Westmore, I made my report and asked him to try Miss Layel’s people with his historic studies.

“Layel, Layel,” repeated he, quickly; “what sort of a person is she?”

“A little dark lady,” I informed him.

He drew a long breath, lost his appearance of interest, and asked carelessly what she had written; and when I told him “novels,” he said abruptly that he did not like scribbling women. Something, I could not conjecture what, had disturbed him in my renewal of the subject, for I could not induce him to say anything more satisfactory than that he would “think about it,” which, in his dilatory, indecisive habits, meant that he would put it off until some indefinitely remote period.

Ursula returning to Erlstone Castle at the end of July, his professional visits were intermitted, and some months elapsed before I had again the opportunity of urging perseverance in his object if he would ever attain success. Meanwhile certain events were happening; of which I must now give an account, having left Connie and Dr. Julius too long behind the scenes.

XIII.

A PICNIC IN THE WOODS.

THERE was but little gaiety going on in Scarcliffe and its neighbourhood this season, and the Cranmers and Willoughbys, having disposed of their respective houses for a few months, had betaken themselves to Leamington; Miss Pegge Burnell, also, had paid a visit to Harrogate, and coming home renovated and much the stronger for the change, gave us a picnic to Erlstone Forest which was very numerously attended.

Mr. Charles Maurice was then at the Rectory, and I imagine that the young gentleman, not hearing any intelligence about Connie such as his observations of the previous Christmas had probably led him to expect, found his hopes revive and was emboldened to measure himself

more decisively against Dr. Julius Eden than he had then ventured to do.

It had not been settled whether or no I should go to Erlstone, and on the morning of the picnic, while Connie and I were sitting at breakfast, he made his appearance and asked if he might have the pleasure of driving us over; only his sister Martha was going from the Rectory besides himself, and their old-fashioned phaeton would hold four delightfully.

Connie telegraphed me a vehement "No," over the coffee-pot, which I transferred to him with more abruptness than I intended, on which he said: "Martha will be disappointed—I understood from her that you had not made your arrangements about going when she was here last night."

"Neither have we, and Doris is undecided yet," returned Connie; "she is waiting to see how papa is this morning, and if she does not go, I am to be put under Miss Pegge Burnell's wing. I think you had better not count on us, but offer your seats to some one else."

"If I don't drive you, I will not drive any

one," was his hasty reply. "But cannot you settle it now? Why do you think of staying at home, Miss Fletcher? This is going to be a glorious day and the forest will be magnificent—you have never seen it in September, I have heard you say. It would do you good, and I am sure your father and mother could spare you for those few hours."

Mamma entering the room at this moment, overheard the last sentence, and immediately said,—

"Spare her to go to Erlstone? of course, we can, Mr. Charles, and I wish her to go." Upon this the young gentleman propounded his scheme for our conveyance, and she added, "A very nice arrangement, Doris; and as Miss Martha will be with you, I can rely on your returning early. You had better accept Mr. Charles's proposition, and allow him to call for you at twelve o'clock. Miss Pegge Burnell could only take one of you with her other friends, and I would rather you went with Connie yourself."

So we had nothing for it but acquiescence—Mr. Charles Maurice conveyed himself away in

delightful spirits, to return exuberant at the appointed hour. He had put his sister into the back seat of the phaeton, and intimating to me that I was expected to join her, he installed Connie in front by himself, and drove us off; gaily carried away in imagination, I have not a doubt, by the beautiful delusion, that this was an omen of their travelling arrangements through life.

Connie could not help being cheerful and happy in cheerful and happy circumstances, and she did nothing to cloud her companion's beatific visions, so that we all arrived at Erlstone as gay as larks. Miss Pegge Burnell had reached the trysting place before us with numerous strangers; but amongst the few whom we knew, we soon singled out Miss Theodora Bousfield. Dr. Julius Eden was not present, and we heard from her that he was not expected; having been called away to some distance beyond Scarcliffe in an opposite direction, which would prevent him being able to reach Erlstone sufficiently early to make it worth his while to come.

“And vastly vexed and disappointed, I assure

you, he was," she added, glancing at Connie, who was vastly vexed and disappointed too.

The picnic luncheon had been spread by Quennell and his assistants in that beautiful opening amongst the trees where Connie and I had rested and dined at our first memorable visit to the forest, and the company were gathering round it already hungry and eager as locusts. Connie was for escaping at once and going to spend the day with Ursula, but I represented to her that it would be rude to our entertainer, and prevailed on her to wait until Miss Pegge Burnell herself retreated, and the guests dispersed themselves through the forest, when our secession would not be likely to cause remark.

The old lady's way of performing her part of the picnic was to arrive early and sit in her carriage to welcome her friends ; to preside from that elevation over the champagne luncheon, and when it was over, to drive off to the castle, pay the countess a visit, and then go home ; managing matters so as to give everybody a chance of enjoyment without fatiguing herself. She disappeared as pre-arranged, and

then, by twos and threes, the rest of the company disappeared also, some in one direction and some in another, to entertain themselves and each other until five o'clock, at which hour carriages and saddle-horses were ordered to be ready, and in waiting at the top of the wood lane, to convey all the company home.

Miss Pegge Burnell's picnics were invariably successful. She did not attempt too much, but relying on the fact that most people enjoy a summer afternoon in the open air, and are gratified with a view of fine scenery, she simply proclaimed her intention of providing a forest luncheon, at such a place, on such a day, to which all her friends and acquaintance would be welcome if they could afterwards amuse themselves by exploring the beauties of the country in the neighbourhood of the rendezvous. But she brought no music, and encouraged no dancing; for she thought a day in the woods might be more healthily spent than in capering about in a space twelve feet square, and that miscellaneous gatherings of people but slightly known to each other, enjoyed themselves more if allowed to

be independent, than they did when hustled into a circle, and set to be gay and happy according to some arbitrary, pre-arranged plan.

When the luncheon was over and the impromptu table deserted by all but Quennell and his underlings, Miss Martha Maurice, who had been instructing me ever since we sat down with an unpunctuated, discursive, and very involved account of a promising tribe of heathen, somewhere indistinctly located in the torrid zone, broke off at her brother's peremptory request, and acceded to his proposal that we should go up to the Wishing Well, after which, Connie quietly intimated, we two must be spared to pay our visit to Ursula.

"Oh, yes, your clever sister, she is at the castle; I had forgotten how close you are to her," said Miss Martha with some self-reproach. "She will expect to see you, and here have I been detaining you with that narrative of the poor Zibys. But it is not interesting; my dear; ought it not to be a matter of gratitude and thankfulness to all of us?"

I said "Yes," without very well knowing

to what I was acceding. I had a vague sort of impression from what Miss Martha had told me, that the Zibys were a pure and harmless people, combining all the savage with most of the Christian virtues, and that, in consequence, it would be advisable to leave them in their primitive simplicity ; but when I ventured to suggest it, she looked much grieved, and all the way up the rugged road to the well, she repeated her story with more excursions into the regions of dimness, and more fluent use of spiritual party phraseology, until when we came to the Erlstone, my wits felt as much benumbed as if she had been very carefully enveloping them in cotton wool, lest their sharpness should do me an injury. Miss Martha Maurice was goodness, earnestness and practical charity itself; her *life* was an example; but her powers of speech were truly bewildering; I have heard Miss Pegge Burnell say that the effect of one of that indistinct, but most well-meaning young woman's preachments upon her was, as if she had extracted the brains from her head, and filled up the cavity with explosive bubbles,

which threatened to blow the top off in their seething irritation. Not being myself of so excitable a temperament as the old lady, my sensations were less severe; but I confess to experiencing a gentle satisfaction, when Mr. Charles, who had caught the oft-repeated name of the interesting pagans, but nothing else, asked abruptly,—

“The Zibys, the Zibys; well, Martha, who are they? a new kind of animal at the Zoological Gardens?”

“No, Charles, no, you have not read your *Record*, or you would not ask such a question,” replied his sister, shaking her head at him. “They are a tribe in the interior of the Continent, I do not exactly remember where, but it is either the source of the Nile, or of the Joliba, or Niger, or the Mountains of the Moon, or further south. At all events, they are subjects of that dreadfully wicked king of Dahomey, who cuts off so many of his people’s heads. But you can look at the account yourself, it is particularly clear.”

“Thanks, Martha, I can be satisfied with your

precise repetition of it," said Mr. Charles, with undisturbed gravity; "only don't expect me to go in pursuit of them, for if they are so widely dispersed, they must be as hard to come at as those birds which can only be caught by putting salt on their tails."

"Charles, don't be irreverent, it is in the *Record* and the *Missionary Intelligencer*," returned his sister conclusively, and the subject was dropped.

There were many persons gathered about the Wishing Well to test its virtues, but they presently began to disperse, and Mr. Charles Maurice being in a rather exalted mood, either with hope or luncheon, then mounted the wet stones to prove his luck; but he mounted with hasty, presumptuous carelessness, and just as he set his foot upon the brink, it slipped in the treacherous green moss, and down he fell, face foremost, into the water.

He was up again in a moment, and standing on the level below, but not before he had heard the merry laugh and rallying cry of a young lady, who was coming from the lower road with a group of friends.

"Give it up, Charlie, give it up, for whatever you were going to wish, will never, never, *never* come true!" was her exclamation; but she ceased laughing, and asked in quite another tone if he were hurt, when she perceived as well as the rest of us, that he was most unreasonably annoyed.

"Hurt, no!" was his short reply, as he stooped to pick up his straw hat, which he had thrown down before the catastrophe.

Miss Martha did not quite believe this, for he had turned first crimson, and then gray-white, and she fussed about with the liveliest solicitude, urging and insisting on his telling her how and where he felt injured. Thus baited, he turned back his sleeve, and showed a slight graze on his wrist, that sixpence would more than have covered. His sister lamented over the wound pathetically, and would dress it with sticking-plaster, which she extracted from a case of articles, useful in accidents, without which she never stirred from home.

"For nobody ever knows *what* may happen, so it is always best to be provided against

emergencies," said she; and the accident was regarded by her with such evident seriousness, that I almost felt shocked myself, when I turned round and saw our Connie and the other young lady laughing.

The other young lady was a niece of Mr. Foxley, a pretty lively little person, and in her company and that of her friends we left Mr. Charles Maurice and his sister when we set off to the Castle. Ursula was overjoyed at our unexpected appearance, and immediately proclaimed a half holiday to the four children with whom we found her engaged in the full tide of lessons; they received the announcement with whoops of delight, flung the books abroad into the corners of the room; and departed with wild manœuvres of arms and legs like freshly caught savages. I cannot say I envied Ursula, but she only said, "There, there, children, you have made noise enough;" watched them tear down the corridor and break violently into the nursery; and then shutting the door, she observed composedly that we need not trouble ourselves about them, for now they would be all safe.

Ursula had given us such flourishing accounts of her comfort and prosperity that I was rather disappointed to find her in the midst of a great bare room, with only a scrap of carpet in the middle of the floor, and a general air of coldness, desolation, and disorder. There was but one high window, barred across and uncurtained, and as it had a northern aspect, there could be very little cheerfulness of sun in it at any hour of the day. I asked her if it was not dull in the winter time.

"Oh, no! I burn a rousing wood fire and set the folding screen round to keep out draughts, and make myself quite cosy," replied she. "Besides one can grow used to anything after a while."

I could not help wondering how she had refrained from complaint, not only in her letters, but also during her six weeks of midsummer holidays! I could account for it in no other way than by supposing that she was too proud to find fault with a position in which she had voluntarily placed herself; and as she looked in boisterous health and vigorous spirits, it appeared that she had really become either resigned or insensible to its

disagreeables. My own proverbial assurance, however, that "home's home, be it ever so homely," was much strengthened by what I saw of governess dependence at Erlstone Castle, and Connie was so much touched that she suggested to Ursula to leave and seek a pleasanter establishment, even if she lost a little in nominal dignity; but Ursula repulsed the idea with scorn.

"I know when I am well off," said she, "I would rather have space like a barrack than be cramped up in closet rooms all furniture and stuffiness; and when the boys go to school, which they will do in about another year, it will be an excellent situation. If you do not believe me, ask Miss Layel, when you have given her a description of all you see, and she will tell you the same. Had not she wretched schoolrooms in three different houses, all of them looking into churchyards, and one which she lived in for two years, with only a deal table and six old stony-hearted dining-room chairs? and when she was fagged out, nothing to lie down on but the floor, with a big music-book for a pillow, and did she not say they were minor miseries, and she could

sleep without rocking, and she did not care? And I can sleep without rocking, and I don't care either; and I have a hundred a year, and nobody interferes with me."

At this moment there was a tap at the door, and on Ursie's saying, "Come in," there entered a dignified, middle-aged person in black silk and a lace cap, with a profusion of ribbons, who, making an apology for a curtsy, said,—

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but would you be pleased to call the young gentlemen and ladies back to the schoolroom, they are very turb'lent in the nursery."

"I must trouble you to keep them for an hour or two, nurse, I have given them a holiday. You may take them out into the park, and let them have a good game at play if they would like it," replied Ursula, with the utmost graciousness, but her face grew very red, and as the woman retired with an air of being much put upon, and closed the door behind her more noisily than was necessary, she said, laughing,—"Nurse and I are at daggers drawn. At first she was jealous of my coming between her and the children at all, but

when she found out the comfort of being relieved of their racket, she soon began to turn them out of the nursery, and drive them back here at all hours. I was obliged to appeal to the countess, and she gave me plenary powers to do as I found desirable; and since then I have required nurse to preside over the romps. I have the children here from breakfast time to twelve o'clock, when I take them for a walk; our dinner is at half past one, and if I am to be good for anything, I must have a quarter of an hour's peace before we begin lessons again. These last until five, when we have tea, then I give them a little reading aloud, or they go to their games until dessert, which is immediately followed by bed. Altogether that grand nurse only has them about one hour in the day, and I have them seven or eight, except on Saturday half holidays, when the girls go for a drive with their grand-mamma, and the boys ride their ponies in the paddock. If I had not had the sense and courage to hold my own against that impertinent woman, I should not have been able to free myself for five minutes from the noisy worry of their presence; and then six or seven

years of such slavery would have knocked me up into a useless piece of lumber like so many other governesses. But she is finding out now that I am not soft enough to be imposed on, and behaves more respectfully. I don't despair of making her understand our relative positions by and by; I have checked every approach to confidential familiarity, and though she spitefully told the children, in my hearing, that I was only the head of the servants, I contrive to make her sensible whenever we exchange civilities, that I am not of the class that sits in housekeepers' rooms, and that my dignity and self-respect are quite independent of ugly surrounding and insufficient comforts."

"But you must often feel lonely and depressed, Ursie, dear," said Connie, pityingly. "I should be wretched with such a woman trying to domineer, and treating me so rudely."

"Oh, I mind nothing about it, I take care never to give her an advantage, and if she takes a liberty, she receives a check as she did just now. I have not had a friend to see me before to-day, in all the nine months I have been here, and it was very rude of her to come in. She knew *that*

when I spoke, or she would have stopped to argue the point."

"You are the right woman in the right place. I should soon be reduced to a cipher."

"And then you would add one more to the rank and file of incapable grumblers who have made governesses the down-trodden class they are. No; if it be only to avenge the wrongs of the sisterhood, I will stand up for my rights! If I want anything I ask for it, and I invariably get it; if I dislike anything I complain, and the grievance is removed. I should despise myself if I supposed I could ever be reduced to the abject humility of some I know,—spiritless creatures who hardly dare call their souls their own."

Before we left, Ursula took us up a stone staircase to her bedroom, which was even darker, larger, and more scant of furniture than the schoolroom under it, and when I made some remark to that effect, she replied,—

"Oh, you should be here on a winter's night, it is gusty enough to blow the hair off your head, but I never have a fire; it is lucky for me I am strong as a horse, as Nurse Bradshaw used to say,

for I am not likely to be much petted and coddled. But I have never regretted for an hour having come."

She seemed, indeed, very well contented with her situation and herself, which was so far satisfactory; she was busy, and when she was busy she was always most at her ease. We sat with her two hours and promised not to communicate anything disquieting to papa and mamma, and when the time came for us to rejoin the Maurices and go home, she walked down with us to the village and saw us off. Miss Martha Maurice admiring her full rosy face, said, as we left her behind, that she was a working woman of the sort to get on in the world; and as she had elected to be a working woman and put her shoulder to the wheel with good will, she deserved any success that could come in her way.

In driving us back to Redcross, Mr. Charles Maurice proposed a different route, longer, and as he said, more picturesque than that by which we had gone in the morning; so much longer, indeed, that it was nearly dark when he brought us to the garden door. Immediately the phaeton stopped, it

was opened from within, and Dr. Julius Eden's voice was heard, saying,—

“Here you are at last! Have you had any accident, Mr. Charles? I assure you we were growing quite anxious.”

He then assisted Connie and myself to alight and hurried us indoors, barely allowing us time to thank our friends for their escort or to wish them good-night, and actually shutting the garden door in Mr. Charles Maurice's face, as he was calling out some last words to Connie about a boating excursion to Avonmore, which they had projected during the return.

Tea was on the table and the lamp lighted, papa and mamma having waited for us more than an hour, so we threw off our hats and sat down just as we were, and answered all interrogatories about the picnic and our visit to Ursie in a full and satisfactory way. Connie's face was looking peculiarly bright and exhilarated, and not at all as if she had bewailed anybody's absence from Erlstone, which was not flattering to Dr. Julius; but he bore it very well, and made himself as much at home and as pleasant as usual, until

nearly ten o'clock, when he took his departure, but not before he had extracted from Connie all particulars of the proposed row under the cliffs to Avonmore, and engaged her by a solemn promise not to go unless he were of the party.

XIV.

A ROW UNDER THE CLIFFS.

BUT it appeared on further information that Mr. Charles Maurice's design of a water-party to Avonmore included only himself, his sister Martha, Connie and me, if I cared to go; and that it was to end with Connie's walking up to the parsonage to drink tea on their return. I suggested that a second rower would be required, and why should he not ask Dr. Julius Eden?

"Dr. Julius Eden! I don't suppose he has handled an oar since he was at Oxford," Mr. Charles replied, shortly. "No, Miss Fletcher, I always take Long William, both for convenience, and to keep my mother from worrying herself when I am on the water."

I waited to see how Connie would extricate

herself from her difficulty ; she attempted it by saying,—

“I told Dr. Julius we were going, and he wished to be of the party ; can you not take him ? Don’t you think it would be rather uncivil to forget after he had expressed a desire ? ”

“No, not at all ! He can row himself to Avonmore whenever he pleases. I did not intend making a public entertainment of it. I wanted you just to come round the Head with Martha and me, and then to go home with us to see my mother, and have tea. Besides, the time I have fixed will interfere with Dr. Julius’s dinner-hour.”

“I don’t think he would care about that for once,” returned Connie, with a simple perseverance difficult to answer.

“Very well ; if he must come, I suppose he *must*—but I am sure he will be in the way,” said Mr. Charles, visibly annoyed.

“Oh, no ; there will be room enough in Long William’s boat. We have been eight in it, and even with him we shall only be six.”

“You are going, then, Miss Fletcher ?—so be

it! But it will be quite another affair from what I intended."

I took no notice of the young gentleman's careless incivility to myself. He was not unreasonably disappointed, and I could make allowance for his feelings getting the better of his politeness at the moment. Soon after he went away, warning us that the hour when the tide would serve on the morrow was three o'clock in the afternoon. We did not see Dr. Julius that evening, but I believe Connie and I both supposed—whether naturally or not, I cannot say—that Mr. Charles Maurice would let him know of the arrangement; but when we went down to the shore next day at the appointed time, we found there waiting, Miss Martha and her brother, but no Dr. Julius, and it occurred to me immediately that he had never been apprised of our intentions. I did not say so, however, until Miss Martha remarked that he was behindhand, and Connie asked if they were sure they had told him the right hour. On which Mr. Charles exclaimed, with obvious gratification,—

"Told him the right hour! I told him

nothing! I have not seen him since he clapped the garden door in my face when I drove you home from Erlstone."

"Then he does not know?" said Connie, dismayed.

"Not unless you sent him word. I certainly did not—never thought of such a thing!"

"It is of no use waiting then, Charles, is it?" said Miss Martha. "If he does not know, I suppose he will not come."

"Most probably not."

It is foolish to exact or to give serious promises about trifles; there we stood on the shore, all of us hesitating, and some of us confused, until Long William having put a plank across the shallow water, that spread between the boat and the sands, exhorted us to "look sharp and not lose the capful of favourable wind that would blow us over to Avonmore in less than no time." It would have been absurd to stand on ceremony or make heroics about such a little thing as a row over the bay, and Connie could not well allege a promise to Dr. Julius as a plea for abandoning it now; so with a glance at me which

bespoke some trouble of conscience, she accepted the proffered assistance of Mr. Charles's hand to place her in the boat. Miss Martha and I followed, and in a few minutes we were pushed out into deep water, and gliding smoothly along under the shadow of the cliffs towards Avonmore Head.

Though we had now been two years at Redcross, this was the first time I had ever been out in a boat, and I was prepared to enjoy it extremely. The gentle motion, the soft air, the measured sound of the oars rising and falling in the water, were inexpressibly quieting and soothing. The scenery, too, was pleasant; not grand, majestic, or awful, but brightly and richly luxuriant. Miss Martha would have it that the Bay of Naples itself was not bluer than Scarcliffe Bay that afternoon, and that travel the world over where you would, you never saw such sweet, happy-looking landscapes as in England; in which patriotic sentiment probably many plain people agree with her.

Avonmore Head formed one horn of the bay of which Scarcliffe formed the other; Redcross

lying about midway between them at a depression in the land where the rocks rose to a much less considerable height. Avonmore village lay beyond the Head, the houses being built on the western slope of the down, the crest of which was crowned by a fine old church, in which hung the beautiful peal of bells that was the pride of the whole country.

They began to ring as we came round under the Head, but this time to a cheerful burden, which threw Miss Martha into a pious rapture of admiration, during the ecstasy of which she recited much incoherent poetry, attributing her stanzas in several instances to the most unlikely authors.

We landed on the beach below the village, and ascended the cliff by a steep zigzag, which brought us to the top of the Church Hill, and there amongst the numberless graves we sat down to rest awhile.

The old church tower was a famous sea-mark, and the glitter of the white head-stones standing in close rank might be descried from afar by outward-bound mariners, and warn them of the

perils of those who "go down to the sea in ships."

Where I sat I had just before me the names of seven of one household, but the grave held the dust of the mother only. Her mariner husband had been drowned with his eldest son on the coast of Ireland; another son died at Port Royal, a third was lost in the ship *Amazon*, burnt on her voyage to America; a fourth "perished with all his company in the regions of eternal frost," as the epitaph had it, and a fifth was cast away on Filey Brig in the great gale of January 10, 1830.

From this beautiful old churchyard we had an extensive prospect both of land and sea, to which the lengthening shadows of the afternoon and the changing tints of the foliage, where masses of yellow and crimson were already mingling with the heavy green, gave a richness and glow beyond imagination. We stayed there for some time, and when we had gazed our fill, strolled away to the grounds of Avonmore Hall. Nature had done so much for them that art could only spoil her wild simplicity, wherever it had in-

truded; and though the glades and trees were lovely, I could not say so much for the pedestalled urns and undraped figures which, from their chilly whiteness and newness, appeared to have been but recently set up. The hall had long been a show-place of third or fourth-rate consideration, but we were content to defer our examination into its treasures until another visit, and after an hour's sauntering in the park, we returned to the beach, proposing to go home again.

But there was now a curl on the water, and a margin of dry sands under the cliff, and Miss Martha, who, by her own confession, was never fond of the water, now expressed an earnest wish to abandon the boat and walk back to Red-cross. In vain Mr. Charles remonstrated, and declared that the motion would be scarcely perceptible; she was sure that the boat would pitch and toss dreadfully, and so nothing should induce her to set foot in it again. Evening was drawing on, and as it seemed vain to stand arguing against her fears, we at last agreed to divide; Connie returning with Mr. Charles and Long William in the boat, while Miss Martha and I

walked along the sands, which she said she should have preferred to entrusting herself again to the boat, if it had been ten times the distance.

“I cannot think how I was prevailed on to come in it, for I am dreadfully nervous; but I suppose it was to please Charles,” she informed me. “I hope and trust nothing will happen to him or your sister now we have left them to themselves.”

We walked briskly, but the boat before us soon diminished to a speck; still it was satisfactory to see that the speck hugged the shore pretty closely, and Miss Martha’s loquacious anxiety was soon diverted to other themes. But all at once we saw something that puzzled us. Miss Martha threw up her hands, exclaiming,—

“They are in the water!” and set off running at the top of her speed. I followed her example, but before we were quite exhausted of breath and strength, a white handkerchief was waved, to intimate to us that the adventure had concluded happily; though when we reached the spot, we found they had been in the water without doubt, and were drenched to the skin.

How it happened nobody exactly knew, Mr. Charles stigmatized the boat as an "old tub," and Long William swore sulkily at the underwater rocks; but they had had an upset and a ducking, which left them in a dripping, deplorable condition.

Miss Martha's exclamations and previsions were truly grievous. In vain we assured her salt water would not give anybody cold; she would insist that they had had a narrow escape from drowning, and that it behoved us to be thankful to Providence for their preservation.

"If the water had only been deeper, and the boat further from land, nothing but a miracle could have saved them!" she said; "and now it will be a mercy if they do not catch their deaths of cold."

But she had no panacea in her pocket against that contingency, unless rose-lozenges would serve, and of these the two young people munched up several by way of calming her terrors, after which nothing remained to be done but achieving our return home on foot as promptly as possible. We left the brother and sister at the parsonage

door, and then crossed the old Grove Fields ourselves to our garden, hoping that the limp and draggled outline of Connie's muslin dress would not be observed from the windows. But it was, and mamma and nurse met us with uplifted hands and voices, and a hurry of eager inquiry, which we answered with repeated assurances that the accident had been a mere nothing—that it was nobody's fault, and would do nobody any harm.

But in spite of Connie's plea that she had never felt better in her life, and that she had only had a bath at the wrong time of day, she was hustled into bed by mamma and nurse, who insisted that there must have been a shock to her nerves when the boat was upset, and that she was certain to have a dreadful cold, though she might not yet have begun to experience its premonitory symptoms. So she sighed, and resigned herself to affectionate persecution with cups of tea and inquiries after feelings that she did not feel; but when a familiar step was heard downstairs, and a familiar voice in conversation with papa in hasty, anxious tones, she pouted a rosy

displeasure, and wished people would not make such a fuss about nothing.

Mamma immediately left us with an air of relief, observing that Dr. Julius Eden was there, and he must see her and order her something—poor dear mamma always had immense faith in physic—on which Connie petulantly exclaimed,—

“Surely, mamma is not going to bring him up here! Oh, Doris, tell her not; I am sure I don’t want to see him—such nonsense!”

But nurse intercepted me, and shaking her head in a threatening way at the rebellious patient who declined to be picturesquely ill when her friends expected it from her, said,—

“If the doctor’d put a leech at the tip of your tongue, Miss Connie, I am of opinion it would do you most good of anything!” and while she was speaking entered the grave physician, with mamma explaining and lamenting the accident.

He could not quite hide his excited feelings, though he had great command of voice and countenance, but nobody who saw Connie’s face could pretend to think her colour meant fever or any

other mischief; except, perhaps, a spurt of temper—and after making a feint of counting her pulse, which must have been going at a furious rate, he only said she had better stay where she was until the morning, and then went down again to reassure papa.

“Did he seem very angry, Doris, I did not dare look at him?” whispered Connie, when we were alone. “What shall I say about having broken my promise not to go to Avonmore without him?”

“He had no particular right to require such a promise. You need not account to him at all that I know of,” said I.

“Did he seem angry?” she persisted.

I told her he did not appear quite implacable, and in that assurance she slept comfortably, and woke in the morning none the worse for her ducking. But Mr. Charles Maurice kept his room and his bed for a week afterwards, and his sisters to this hour commemorate his providential deliverance from drowning, and a death of cold, with serious and unwearying thankfulness. But I think the young man was that day delivered

out of a delusion only—the delusion that his companion in misfortune was likely to cast in her lot with him for life's long voyage, and that rescue, though perhaps not effected without pain, was worth being grateful for no less.

XV.

A CRISIS.

OF course Dr. Julius Eden called to inquire the next day, and Connie's flutter of fear was quite undisguised when he entered the drawing-room; but so also was her flutter of relief and joy when she found nothing was to be said about the broken promise. Connie was still full of childlike ways and notions; if she had done any one she loved a displeasure, she was never quite at her ease again until there had been a sort of "kiss and make friends" between them; this nursery ceremony could not, however, with propriety be suggested to Dr. Julius; but she looked everything that was pretty and penitent, and he, in his turn, intimated that her offence was to be magnanimously passed over.

I was present, and it was evening—a very

beautiful evening, as I distinctly remember—and after some desultory chat Dr. Julius asked Connie a question about our late blooming roses, which it required an expedition of research into the garden to answer with exactness; as they were leaving the room I said simply,—

“As soon as I have finished this row of my netting I will come to you, but don’t wait for me,” on which Dr. Julius returned and whispered in my ear, with much emphasis,—

“Do stay where you are, Doris, we don’t want you. I have not had Connie to myself for five minutes since I have known her.”

Which was not strictly correct—but let that pass.

“Are you coming?” cried Connie, from the outside, and the doctor vanished forthwith.

I stayed alone with my netting and my reflections for some twenty minutes afterwards, and then I carried them with me into the dining-room, and joined papa and mamma. They inquired where Connie was, and when I told them they looked quite content, and as if the intelligence were a mere matter of course; mamma only

remarking that Dr. Julius must not keep her out after the dews began to fall.

I had gone up-stairs to hunt for certain working materials in my odd-and-end drawer, and had been delayed a considerable time by the difficulty of finding what I required before I heard the pair come into the house again. They proceeded first to the drawing-room, then to the dining-room, and finally Connie ran up to seek me, calling softly, in a new voice,—

“Doris, where are you. I want you.” And as I turned round to meet her, she caught me in her arms, and said in that happy tone: “Doris, it has all come true! He loves me; I dreamed he did!”

“Then it was one of the dreams you never told me,” said I. “But I am very glad to hear it now, though it is nothing surprising. I have known it a long while.”

“Have you? So did papa and mamma, and they agreed; I don’t think I should have been told yet but for that dear old boat’s upsetting yesterday.”

“Oh, Connie, but you *knew*!”

"I was not *sure*. Guess, Doris, what it was he wished at the Erlstone Well that first time of our going to the forest? He said some day he would tell me, and he has."

"He wished what you have promised him to-night."

"Ah, you witch, how could you tell? Do you like him, Doris?"

"Passably; he is a good kind of person; I think he will do very well. He is rather old, that is all."

"Doris!" this very reproachfully.

"Is tea ready?"

"Yes, I came to tell you. Doris, love me. Say you think I shall be happy!" *this* with much impetuosity.

"So I do, my darling!" cried I, changing my mood as hers changed from gay to grave feeling. "I was only teasing, but now I will be serious. He is the person I set my heart on for my pet almost from the beginning of our acquaintance, and I am more glad than words can express that you love each other, and will spend your lives as one together."

"That is my precious, comfortable old Doe! I knew you could not be really making fun of me. Now let us go down-stairs again."

So we went down-stairs again, and Dr. Julius gave me a grateful squeeze of the hand as I entered, in thanks for my look of satisfaction and approval. He seemed highly exultant, and we were all very cheerful and happy round papa's fire, which was lighted at dusk, until the clock on the chimney-piece struck ten, and warned the lovers that it was time to separate. Then Dr. Julius disappeared, and Connie disappeared also; but I stayed behind for a few words with papa and mamma about the momentous event. They were both glad to speak of it, and from what they said, I learned that even before Ursula's quick wit led her to the conjecture, there had been a full understanding between them and Dr. Julius Eden on the subject of Connie.

"We have known Dr. Julius Eden's wishes for many months," said mamma; "but Connie is very young. She is without judgment or serious thought, and we would rather have had his declaration to herself delayed for a year or two

longer ; but that affair yesterday annoyed him ; he complained of his insecurity with her while she was free ; and as Connie's sentiments hardly admitted of a denial, we consented to its being an engagement, though we wish it to be kept among ourselves, as they cannot marry yet. He is not independent of his uncle, and she must wait until she is of age."

I agreed ; they could afford to wait very well ; but what, I wished to know, was Dr. Julius's view of the delay ?

"He is not too well satisfied," replied papa ; "but I gave him distinctly to understand that I should not recede from my principles. Connie is young of her age in everything, and I insisted on their waiting, as the first condition of their engagement. Meanwhile he must either establish himself in his profession alone, or it is possible that before the time is out, Dr. Eden, who is near seventy, may retire in his favour. I do not care for any of you making a rich match, but I should not like to see you married to poverty, or carried to any home as a wife where you could not also reign as mistress. Young folks are eager and

hasty; they would give all for love, and think the world well lost, therefore it behoves their elders to exercise a little prudence on their behalf." •

I had not a syllable to say against this. Papa and mamma were both evidently satisfied with the little one's prospects, and so far as human foresight could reach, they had every cause to be so. Connie was but seventeen, and from her bringing up she had retained the manners and thoughts of childhood longer than most girls do. Dr. Julius had been attracted by her beauty, and charmed by her tender simplicity, and might well wish to appropriate to himself her generous and loving heart in all its freshness; but she was very young beside him, and would, perhaps, have come to be treated as a pretty toy and plaything rather than as a companion and a wife if they had married at once.

Papa left us, and then mamma expressed this to me privately, saying it would not be good for Connie, who, though she liked to be petted and indulged, and would exercise her capricious little tyrannies over those whom affection made sub-

missive, had still in her character the germs of noblest womanhood, which a few years of quiet patience would develope and ripen, raising her to be his friend, and equal and true wife in every sense; but also if an irreverent though loving rule had been established over her in her immaturity, preparing for her a life-long ordeal of restlessness and discontent. She was not one who could find her sufficient happiness in being the caressed darling of idle hours, the nurse-tender of sickness, the mother-drudge, or the careful housewife, if she were not also made the sharer of her husband's higher interests and wider thoughts.

"No, Doris," said mamma, very seriously. "It must not be yet. The child is but a child now, but she will be a woman by and by. She could not, with all her attractiveness and native power, be a companion for Dr. Julius as she is. He is a man of high cultivation; if they married at present he would do all that he supposed to be his duty to her, but he would not dispense with Miss Theodora Bousfield's conversation: he would feel the want of the equal and intelligent friendship that he has maintained with her for so many

years, and Connie would not bear it; she is not of the temper to bear a rival in the best part of the heart to which she would justly suppose she had established a claim by the gift of all her own. From every point of view I think it is right to defer their marriage, and I hope you will not support him in his anxiety to limit the term of their waiting to a single year, for neither your father nor I will consent to it until he has an independent home and practice, and Connie is of full age; and the one event can hardly be accomplished before the other."

This decision was to be regarded as final, I found, so I did not venture to advance my own private opinion, that eighteen or nineteen is a very suitable age for a girl to marry, but betook myself to my room and Connie's happy company. And the dear little soul was very happy! She had nurse Bradshaw with her, and nurse was trying to solemnize her by a few portentous moral remarks, to which she was literally stopping her ears, while saying,—

"I won't listen, nursey—I won't listen until you change your face."

My entrance caused a diversion.

"I wash my hands of you, Miss Connie," cried the old woman; "you never would hearken to reason; you are no more fit to be married than the man in the moon, and I wish he had you, that I do."

"Don't be cross, nurse, I only said I felt *taller*," remonstrated Connie, removing her hands.

"Ay, and the next news'll be your wanting flounces to your frocks, like Miss Ursula, to make you look a bit more of a woman! Well, good-night to you, and staid manners, which is needed," said nurse, with dignity; but she relented before she went away, and embraced her latest charge, encouraging her with an assurance that if she tried, she knew she could be a good girl.

After she was gone, Connie marched two or three times the length of the room, with her white arms stretched above her head, and her fingers interlaced, from which exercise she turned to me suddenly, and asked, while her eyes brightened with tears,—

"I am too happy, Doris, is it natural? will it last?"

"It is right and natural enough, and, please God, it *will* last," said I. "I remember the overglad feeling myself."

"Poor Doris! we are not half good enough to you; we all think of ourselves," she said, very fondly; and between her joy and my old sorrow we wound up the night with a few mutual tears.

XVI.

AN INTERLUDE.

CONNIE'S engagement with Dr. Julius Eden was not to be made public—on that we were all agreed—but it had not existed a week before we became aware that it was known to Miss Theodora Bousfield, to Miss Pegge Burnell, and Mrs. Maurice, by whomsoever communicated. Miss Theodora congratulated Connie in the most warm-hearted manner; she said, “My dear, I have wished it for a long, long time; you could not have made a happier choice. I have known Julius Eden since he was a boy, and he is all that is most honourable, just and good.”

Miss Pegge Burnell pronounced it an excellent arrangement, and Mrs. Maurice said with a sigh she was glad it was settled and she trusted it

would turn out as well as we had every reason to anticipate.

It now only remained to transmit the information to Ursula, who replied to it in cool terms of approbation.

“Dr. Julius has spoken his mind at last, has he?” she wrote in a letter to me. “I am glad of it; he has been so leisurely in making it up, that it is to be hoped he will not change it again. Connie will have to take care how she manages him, and to be less universally delightful than is her practice, but I daresay she will soon put on the airs of an engaged young lady, holding her head high, and behaving herself with sage reserve. What has become of Mr. Charles Maurice? I think if he had persevered he might have beaten Dr. Julius; and I wish he had. Dr. Julius is almost too old for Connie; thirteen years is a great disparity,—half thirteen would have been better; I should imagine he would prove more exacting than indulgent, and she knows nothing but indulgence. In my humble opinion, she would have had more chance of happiness with the other swain; but that is not

likely to influence her much now. And Miss Theodora Bousfield takes it in a kind spirit, does she? Well! all I can say is that she shows more magnanimity or more indifference than I should do if I stood in her place. I agree with papa and mamma in considering it judicious to keep the engagement amongst ourselves—‘there’s many a slip twixt the cup and the lip,’—though the general envy and astonishment of Redcross would have been cheerful to witness. Dr. Julius has never been an object of speculation because he was supposed to be sentimentally vowed to Miss Theodora, but how vexed the Willoughbys, and Brown-Standons and the rest of the unattached young women will be, when they are informed that the best match of their acquaintance has put himself at the feet of an insignificant chit like our Connie!”

Ursula’s epistolary style was not particularly pleasing or flattering, but it was *her* style, and as such, it passed amongst us without much consideration or regard; only Connie said thankfully she was glad Ursie was not at home just at this crisis, for if she had been, *she* should have had no peace; and I was glad too.

I liked my darling to enjoy her bit of romance and con the new love story with Dr. Julius, unannoyed by the drawback of her sarcastic presence. Ursula was, as she herself expressed it, "a very material person ;" she never scrupled to turn the delicate webs of fancy wrong side up, or to twitch out all the golden threads on which her fingers could lay hold. Therefore if any one was engaged in weaving a shining tapestry wherewith to deck a castle in the air, or a domestic home in the future, it was wise to keep it beyond her ken ; for she could mar its beauty utterly, and yet feel never a pang for the fairy work she had destroyed.

I have a wholesome awe of these rough handlers of dainty devices ; so much of the bliss of life lies in our dreams, that to rend them is to destroy a tangible good which may never be restored. A hard, unkindly speech has made a blank on many a wall where hopeful fancy had aforesaid hung a gay picture, that was light to the eyes, and food to the soul of its designer. I think most people's house of life would show suites of dreary chambers if they were compelled to reduce their furniture

to existent facts; to pull down the air-spun draperies, and extinguish the lamps that only burn by the flame of hope, expectation or desire.

For two or three months after Connie and Dr. Julius had come to a knowledge of what they supposed to be 'good for them, nothing of any moment occurred. My old Thought-Book shows long gaps of three and four weeks at a time between each entry. A visit with Connie to lame Jessie, now able to move indoors without her crutches, an evening at the Priory, the periodical recurrence of the Dorcas meetings, and a call on the Westmores or the Layels, are the greatest events recorded. We were all quietly happy and contented at home, and these pleasant interludes between the acts of life afford little whereon to expatiate.

Thus the autumn slipped by unmarked; November followed with mist and rain; then swiftly on its heels came snowy white December with holly-decked churches, Christmas mummers, winter amusements and our sister Ursula from Erlstone.

XVII.

THE COMING CLOUD.

URSULA came home for her holidays that Christmas in a queer, querulous, litigious temper, which, to my grieved amazement, broke out nowhere so often as in ill-natured allusions to Connie's engagement; and one night when Dr. Julius had left after drinking tea with us, her splenetic humour reached its climax.

"I wish there was an end of this love-making and nonsense!" cried she waspishly. "Dr. Julius is here for ever; one can scarcely call the house one's own. I shall never get my new nightgowns made at this rate."

"What has Dr. Julius to do with your new nightgowns, Ursie?" asked Connie opening her eyes in laughing surprise.

"I cannot sit up in my own room to sew in this

cold weather, and I cannot pretend to bring such work into the drawing room when he is a fixture there."

"I am sure, Ursie, you may sew at what work you like for him—he will never see whether you are making nightgowns or petticoats, and if he did, what matter?"

"If *you* don't know what propriety is, Connie, I hope *I* do," was the stately answer.

Connie reddened and would have retorted, but a glance of entreaty from me checked her; the asperity of Ursula's tongue was very trying, but so much the more need for incessant watchfulness over our own.

Dr. Julius was perfectly innocent of all offence, and continued to come as usual, welcome to all of us but Ursula. His frequent visits chafed her more and more; she even declared on one occasion that they quite spoilt her holidays, and as if that assurance were not sufficiently annoying, she added significantly, "If I were in Connie's place I would never be dangled after and watched as she is; it is utterly absurd to suppose he cannot live unless he sees her every day. They

are new to each other comparatively now, but if Dr. Julius has to play patience three years longer, and is allowed to come hanging about the house just as he pleases, he will tire of it. Mark my words—there was never a man yet who did not tire of a tedious engagement; and if papa holds to his very sensible resolution, I should never be surprised to hear that theirs had fallen through.”

These cheerful remarks were ostensibly addressed to me, but poor Connie was sitting by and, of course, she profited by them to the same extent as myself; there were tears in her eyes as she looked up dismayed, and asked Ursie how she could be so unkind as to suggest such a possibility?

“I am not unkind,” was the reply, “I am speaking the truth, and in your own interest. You are a silly, credulous little thing, and will believe whatever flatters your vanity; but I have seen a little more of the world, and I know what men are made of; the very best amongst them is not to be trusted.”

Ursula’s vast experience posed us both; we

knew that her own affections had never been engaged, but, as a bystander, she might have seen more of the game than ourselves; however, I chose to encourage Connie, who, indeed, had such a love and confidence in Dr. Julius that she was not easily disturbed. But Ursula's quiver of practical wisdom was not empty yet, and the next arrow she shot home was one barbed with the pleasant advice that Connie should imitate her own example, and take a situation as governess to pass the time until she was of age and ready to fulfil her engagement. The idea of such a measure vexed me inexpressibly, and what I said against it probably tended to rivet the project in Ursula's mind; she was always very tenacious of her own plans, and having broached this one and excited my wrathful condemnation of it, she next proceeded to lay it very plausibly before papa and mamma, who were naturally more astonished than delighted thereby. Papa, indeed, was angry, and declared the little one should never leave home with his consent, and as for her "making herself too common," as Ursula phrased it, Dr. Julius was not a fool or a boy to weary of his love because

he saw her often. Ursula had, however, much influence over mamma's mind, and she made frequent and urgent representations to her of the impropriety of Connie's engagement being talked about by all the world, until, at length, the scheme which had at first appeared too ridiculous to be listened to, came, at last, to be reasonably talked over and discussed as a perfectly practicable possibility.

Connie set her own face silently yet steadily against it, and I opposed it with all my powers of speech; but every one knows how a disagreeable idea, persistently and skilfully worked, may be made in process of time to lose all its angles and difficulties. Before half of Ursula's seven weeks' holiday had elapsed, it had gained such a standing ground amongst us as to have come to a point in the reluctant admission by papa, that if everybody else thought it advisable for Connie to leave home for a couple of years or so, he would not prevent it. By that time other people interested in the matter had been made aware of it, and to an individual had received it with disfavour. Dr. Julius as most intimately concerned next to

Connie herself, treated the proposal with contemptuous surprise (as Ursula said, of course he would), and by way of turning it off into a jest said to papa, that he wanted a governess himself, and would be happy to take Connie off his hands immediately if he was in a hurry to get rid of her. Dr. Eden cried, "Pshaw! make a governess of her! worry her into the grave! quite time enough when she has children of her own to plague her," and Miss Pegge Burnell asked if she was prepared to uglify herself and wear green spectacles, and prophesied that if she were not, she would never do for a governess! And so Ursula's scheme for a little time sank into abeyance, and when she went back to Erlstone at the end of her holidays, the lovers had another month or two of their "foolish philandering."

But I suppose it was to be; circumstances fought for Ursula against all of us. You may remember that when Roseberry was sold, and all our means of living reckoned up before we came to settle at Redcross, they were found so narrow that a cousin of mamma's, Sir Archibald Grant, had promised to increase them by a pension of a

hundred a year during mamma's lifetime and papa's as well. The pension had been paid regularly and ungrudgingly, but Sir Archibald dying suddenly during the February of this year, it ceased. He left a large family of sons and daughters, and his will, made long before the period of papa's reverses, contained no mention of the annuity, and his children could hardly be expected to continue it. The loss occasioned no breach of friendliness amongst us, but it very obviously diminished our independence.

Ursula came over from Erlstone to select her mourning, with leave to remain three days at home, and well I knew what we had to expect before she opened her lips to speak on the dreaded subject. She was ruddy and boisterous, loud of voice and heavy of foot as ever; she had money in the bank now of her own earning, and was a more important and authoritative person than even of old.

"You see, Doris, what a sensible move mine was," she said to Connie and me in private the night of her arrival; "if I had not gone out before I *must* have gone out now, under all

the disadvantages of its being an urgent necessity. As it is, behold me in a comfortable position and able to help at home; for whatever I have laid by is papa's and mamma's for the asking."

We said she was very good, but we hoped to be able to get on without appropriating her savings; and Connie, in her grateful enthusiasm, promised never to accuse her of selfishness any more.

"It is all very easy to talk," responded Ursula; "but are *you* prepared to break with *your* selfishness, Connie, and make one less at home?"

Connie relapsed into silent dismay, and I answered for her that I hoped our circumstances would not drive us to *that*. "We have such a dislike to Connie leaving us; and Dr. Julius, who has every right to be considered, cannot endure the thought of it," I said.

"It is all pride and prejudice on Dr. Julius's part, and all indolence on Connie's," was the peremptory reply; "she hates work, and he does not want to put it into anybody's power to say that his wife was once in their service. It will

do Connie a world of good to be removed for a time from all this petting and flattery, and will teach her to know herself; unless papa will change his mind and let them be married out of hand."

"But that, you know, Ursie, he never will do," said I.

"I never expected he would, and the conclusion of the matter is this; either Connie must relieve the house of her support, or papa's and mamma's little comforts must be curtailed, or I must give help to the utmost limits of all I can save."

"Don't say any more, Ursie; if it comes to that, I will go anywhere and do anything rather than you should suffer for it," said Connie, in a trembling voice. "I daresay it is selfish in me wanting to stay at home, but I did not look at it in that light before."

"I know you did not, but it is quite just and reasonable that what you cannot see for yourself should be plainly and candidly laid before you. There are nearly three years before you will be allowed to marry, and you might as well

exert yourself in the interval, as stop idling here with somebody else slaving to keep you."

Connie left the room to hide the tears she could not repress, and while I was down in the town with Ursula making her purchases, she saw Dr. Julius, and opened her heart to him, urging him to let her go for peace's sake. But Dr. Julius said No; Ursula was a prude and a busybody, and his Connie should not be the victim of her crotchety domineering. We found him still at the cottage on our return, and he took Ursula to task, at once, for her tyrannical interference; but Ursula, who was afraid neither of Dr. Julius, nor doctor anybody else, gave him the benefit of her opinions quite as frankly as Connie and myself. I had never seen him angry before, but he now quite lost his temper for a minute or two, during which he proceeded to speak such severely unpalatable truths to her, that Connie, with a rush of passionate tears in her eyes, put up one of her pretty hands to close his lips; he caught hold of it, and made her go out into the garden with him, where he confided to her privately that he had never before felt

such a temptation to box a woman's ears as he had done to box Ursula's, while she was laying down the law and bemoralizing him like a school-boy that afternoon.

Connie and he were up and down the winterly garden walks for more than an hour after, and then Connie came up to me in our room and told me Dr. Julius was having some talk with papa alone. I asked her what about.

"Oh," said she, with a sigh half happy, half disconsolate, "he wishes that we should be married in the spring; and if papa will consent, I have promised too, but I don't expect he will."

"Neither do I, my darling, though that would be the easiest way out of our difficulties."

"And if he does not, then I must try to prevail on Julius to let me go quietly out of the way somewhere, but he says he will not; absolutely *will not*, and he is as determined quite as papa. Oh! Doris, how will it end? It was too good to expect that everything would go on as smoothly as it has done hitherto, and I suppose my rough bit is coming now."

"Don't despair, Connie," said I; cheerfully, "you

have a happy future before you, though it be delayed a year or two."

"I trust so." We sat there together for some time, lightening our anxieties by all manner of hopes and suggestions, until the familiar clink of cups and saucers, as nurse Bradshaw carried tea into the drawing-room, warned us to go downstairs again, when Ursula told us that Dr. Julius had left the house about five minutes before, without seeing anybody after his long private conversation with papa.

From this we felt sure that he had gained no concession by his urgency, and when papa came in to tea he looked greatly agitated, and would speak to none of us. Mamma, however, soon contrived to intimate that there had been no quarrel between him and Dr. Julius, though appearances suggested it. Papa was always very firm in his own views, and his obstinacy did not lessen as he grew older. He had vowed to himself years ago, that no daughter of his should marry until she was of age; settled in character, constitution and principles; and no representation that his prejudices against earlier

- marriages were erroneous or overstretched could induce him to depart from his word. Dr. Julius and Connie must, therefore, acquiesce in it, or marry without his consent and against his express wishes and commands.

“I would rather die than do that,” said Connie vehemently, when mamma told her, and papa had gone back to his easy chair in the dining-room; “how could papa think I would be so wicked?”

“You can put an end to all difficulty and discussion by peaceably removing yourself from Redcross for a time, you know, Connie,” suggested Ursula, shrewdly returning to the attack. “There is no need you should undertake such hard work as mine.”

“I would rather go out myself, than let Connie go,” interposed I hurriedly; “indeed, why should I not? I am better prepared for it in every respect; I am older, and more apt at teaching, and there is no Dr. Julius in my case to be thwarted.”

“Such nonsense!” ejaculated Ursula, with pettish contempt; “you are no more fit for the close drudgery of teaching than you are fit to fly.

Your health and spirits would both break down in less than a twelvemonth."

"Say no more, Doris, wait till to-morrow," whispered Connie; "*you* shall never leave home to save *me*."

So we waited until the morrow, and then there was another scene of argument and contention between Ursula and Dr. Julius, which concluded with another lovers' loiter in the holly walk; from which, to my dismay, Connie came in weeping bitterly. It seemed from her sobbing confession that Dr. Julius had been urging that she owed a duty to him, quite as distinct, and quite as binding as her duty of obedience to her father, and that rather than agree to her going amongst strangers, he would have had her set his consent at naught, and marry without it; and when Connie had resisted his pleadings, as I knew she could resist where her respect for papa was involved, Dr. Julius had grown angry, reproachful, passionate, and had, in fact, behaved in a much more headlong and unreasonable manner than was at all consonant with his age and position. The following day I saw him myself, and he said to me

deliberately and decisively, "If Connie leaves home and her father's protection before she is given to mine, remember, Doris, it is against my wishes, my prejudices and my *rights*. It will annoy me inexpressibly, and I wish you one and all to be aware of it. Connie is not suited for the position into which Ursula would thrust her against her inclination, and I have not the slightest hesitation in avowing that I would rather my wife had never held it."

"Dr. Julius, I am quite of your mind, and I trust we may circumvent Ursula yet," said I; "she fancies she is acting judiciously, but she is mistaken."

"Ursula fancies nothing, and she is never mistaken," said her voice at the door; and in she came, looking jubilant and full of intelligence. *

The interruption was far from welcome, but Ursula had something to tell, and without delay, she proceeded to disburden her mind.

"I shall not go over the old ground," she began, "or debate any more the pros and cons of the business, but tell you at once that I have just

heard of a very easy situation, within a walk of Redcross, which is exactly the thing for Connie."

Dr. Julius turned angrily away, but Ursula, with a meaning smile and a gentle shrug of her shoulders, went on, "It is with Mrs. Tom Claridge; she wants a governess for her two little girls, and will give fifty guineas to a suitable person. Can anybody object to *that*?"

"Yes, Ursula, I can," exclaimed Dr. Julius, facing round upon her, with an air of restrained indignation: "I can object to it on every side; but not to renew my general grounds for desiring Connie to stay under her father's roof until I take her away myself, I may say that I very particularly object to her becoming the companion, and in some sort doubtless the *confidante*, of a miserably injured wife. I say not a word against Mrs. Tom Claridge, whose unhappy lot I pity from my soul, but I will not have Connie's mind brought within the contagion of that poor lady's most wretched experiences."

"Why Mrs. Tom Claridge is to be scouted because she has the misfortune to be tied in a

semi-detached fashion to a bad husband, I cannot imagine," said Ursula loftily.

"I did not intimate that she was to be scouted, Ursula; on the contrary, a mature, good, kindly woman as her companion and children's teacher may be her salvation, but Connie is not fit for such an office in such a house, and she shall never fill it by my leave;" with which intimation Dr. Julius left us, and Ursula proceeded to say that she considered he was assuming an authority over Connie's movements to which a mere *engagement* could give him no claim. "If they were married he could not speak more imperatively," said she, "and if he rules her so strictly *now*, what will he do when she is really his property?"

The next morning, rather to the relief of all of us, the carriage arrived from Erlstone Castle to convey Ursula back to the sphere of her duties; and when she was safely out of the way, with her terribly practical plans, Connie began to breathe freely again, and Dr. Julius and she lived a little longer in their sunshine. But before the week's end, there arrived one of Ursula's excellent, sensible letters to mamma, in which all she had

ever uttered by word of mouth was strenuously and patiently reiterated in connection with Mrs. Tom Claridge's governess needs. It sounded so well in the reading, so kind, thoughtful, and considerate, that I was hardly surprised when papa closed the perusal of it with the remark: "If the little one must go anywhere, she cannot do better than go there; it is but five miles off, and we might see her once a week. What say you, Connie, will that do?"

Connie tried to evade a direct answer, but a few cross questions elicited such of Dr. Julius's objections as he had thought fit to tell her; and papa, who had been undoubtedly ruffled by the doctor's previous expostulations and arguments, exclaimed,—

"Pooh, pooh! I would not allow you to go out of reach of home; this is close at hand, and seems the very thing for you. Speak, mamma, what is your opinion?"

"I see reason in what Dr. Julius urges," was her reply, "and, therefore, we will do nothing in haste."

That day, calling on Miss Pegge Burnell, I told

her how Connie's liberty was likely to be infringed, and made certain inquiries of her about Mrs. Tom Claridge, whom I had never seen, and of whom I had only heard in her character of Mr. Tom Claridge's ill-used wife.

The old lady spoke of her with much kind feeling ; she said,—

“It was an unlucky hour when little Ethel Digby gave herself to such a reprobate. You see she was one of many girls without sixpence to her fortune, and, in a worldly point of view, Tom Claridge was a great match for her. She was quite a beauty when he married her, and not eighteen, and for six months or so he worshipped her ; then I suppose he tired of her, and there were desperate quarrels, and appeals to relations and reconcilements without end ; for the infatuated little soul would go on loving and forgiving him, until last year, when some delinquency, worse than all before, came out ; many of his friends turned their backs on him, and he and his wife made a formal agreement to separate ; the two little girls being left with their mother, and she herself bound to live in a house belonging to her father-in-law,

and always under his protection. It was the most satisfactory arrangement that could be made, and Mr. Tom has not honoured Scarcliffe with his presence since it was settled; and that is the present position of affairs."

"It could not be a proper home for Connie under such circumstances," I said.

"It would be much more objectionable if there were another patched-up reconciliation," replied Miss Pegge Burnell. "She would take no harm with poor Ethel, who is an affectionate, warm-hearted creature, and who would love her dearly. I should be glad to hear of her having a friendly companion, and I think Connie's tenderness would be roused for her too; I am sure the pretty one would be happier and more at her ease with her than she would be at another Erlstone Castle."

"Very likely, but I perceive objections, and if I did not, Dr. Julius's opinion ought to be respected."

"Very true, so it ought; I agree with him that the less a girl's mind is familiarized with evil the better. But the long and the short of Dr. Julius's

opposition is that he wants Connie himself, he as good as told me so, and I do not blame him; still your father's prejudice must be respected, and if he will not shorten their term of waiting, it might be judicious for the little one to occupy herself during the interval,—your father's and mother's lessened means being considered. It would not be quite just to tax Ursula for all, would it?"

There could be no two opinions on that point, and I left the Priory with a dreary feeling that our prejudices would finally have to succumb to the force of reason and circumstances. At this uncomfortable angle the matter remained stationary for a week or two longer, when I left home to pay my customary visit to aunt Maria. Returning towards the end of May, I found it still in the same position; Dr. Julius resolute against it, papa and mamma indecisive, and Connie looking forward to Ursula's holiday with reasonable dread, as a season of certain discomfort and persecution; and her fears were not alleviated by the knowledge that during those terrible seven weeks, she should be left without the confidence and support of her

lover's presence; Dr. Julius having announced his intention of taking a three months' holiday tour through Spain in the summer; his probable time of starting being just before Ursula's arrival.

But all our doubts, fears, prejudices, and provisions were summarily annihilated by a piece of unconsidered and unexpected promptitude on papa's part, and the seeming impossibility of setting it aside.

The working party met at Mrs. Cranmer's that month, and Connie and I, after attending it as usual, returned home about seven o'clock; to be received by papa with the announcement that, in our absence, mamma and he had had some visitors.

"Mrs. Tom Claridge and her little girls," exclaimed mamma; "it seems that Ursula has been writing to her on Connie's behalf."

Ah! how well I knew Ursie's mischievous pen of a ready writer. But it was of no use to be angry at her interference; perhaps she thought she was acting for the best, so we sat down to hear all about it before going upstairs to take off our bonnets.

Papa was never circumlocutory in his narratives, and he told us at once that he had been so much taken by the poor lady's sadness and pathetic grace, that when she mentioned Ursula's letter, as having informed her that one of his daughters was seeking an engagement as governess, he had met her half way ; and in deference to her urgent wish, had actually arranged that Connie should go to her in that capacity during the ensuing week.

"The children are gentle, subdued little creatures, very different to Ursula's unruly crew," added he ; "and if it was necessary for you to leave us at all, Connie, you cannot go to easier work or a kinder little mistress."

Connie drew a long breath, and rose to leave the room, saying,—

"You have settled it, papa," and when she was gone out, papa asked me if I thought his promptitude had grieved her.

"For Dr. Julius's sake, it may ; he was vehemently opposed to it," I replied. "But since the agreement is made, you must bear the blame, papa."

"Nay," said he, "it is Ursula's doing; I would rather not have parted with the little one; she is the only bit of sunshine about the house. But they were making her a bone of contention, and she will be happier away for awhile. Had I not arranged for her to go to this poor lady close at home, I should have lived in perpetual anxiety of her being conjured into a situation at the ends of the earth." I had suspected that to be the secret motive of papa's proceeding before he confessed it.

Letters between Connie and Dr. Julius had hitherto been brief and rare; but that evening a lengthy epistle was despatched to the old-fashioned, red-brick house at the entering into Scarcliffe, which brought Dr. Julius up to the cottage post haste the following morning, while Connie and I were still sitting at breakfast, papa and mamma not being yet downstairs. He had the document with him, and was in a firmly indignant state of mind, which neither reasoning nor submission could appease. I was thankful that the necessity of being about his business limited his time, but even during the short half hour he remained he

contrived to make Connie very unsettled and unhappy.

That afternoon Mrs. Tom Claridge drove to our house again in her pony carriage, bringing her children with her for a personal interview with their future governess; and in all three there was something inexpressibly touching and winning, to hearts not quite closed against sympathy and pity. I saw that Connie's generous feelings went out at once towards that poor lady with the hollow cheek, and plaintive, eloquent eyes; and that she longed to brighten the pale little children's faces that had lived so long under the shadow of their mother's misery, that the natural bloom of baby beauty had quite faded away from them. They also took to her, and the smaller of the two came shyly to her knee, and put up a tiny hand to stroke her cheek, on which Connie lifted her into her lap, and they made friends immediately.

In upon this scene entered suddenly Dr. Julius, and, after a second's hesitation, was quite at home, calm, courteous, and gentlemanlike in the midst of it; though a blush on Connie's cheek and a perceptible quickening of her breathing

betrayed to me her fears of his displeasure. It seemed that he was acquainted with the poor lady and her children, at least professionally; for a few sentences, relative to the health of the elder, were exchanged between them; and then Mrs. Tom Claridge said with a grateful look toward Connie,—

“This young lady is coming to take care of them for me, and I trust they will be stronger when they are under cheerful discipline.” Dr. Julius responded with a quiet “Indeed,” and a reflective glance all round the party. I think he must have discerned Connie’s alarms in her fluctuating colour, and have felt a qualm of conscience for having inflicted them; for he benignly offered a little alleviation in the remark, “They appear to be good friends already.”

Connie looked up smiling and acquiescent, and a few minutes after Mrs. Tom Claridge and her children departed; to my sensible relief, for there was an uncomfortable restraint upon us all. There were a few moments of silence when they were gone, which Connie broke by saying, gently,—

“ You are not angry, Julius ? ”

“ I am not angry, but I am utterly discontented and aggrieved,” was his steady reply. “ I looked for more judgment in your father ; I imagined he held Ursula’s wisdom as cheap as myself. That an arrangement has been made for you which you are bound to adopt, does not alter my opinion of its injudicious folly.”

Connie looked sad, but said nothing, so I left them to finish their little fight by themselves, hoping they would proclaim a peace before they parted, which they did ; the silent eloquence of Connie’s beauty winning for her better terms than the most sensible and practical arguments could have done. When she rejoined me her countenance was beaming and joyous again, and she told me that Dr. Julius had promised not to blame her any more, or even to speak his sentiments to Ursula ; though she was ordered to rest assured that in his own mind he was as much averse as ever to the new mode of life into which she was being hustled.

XVIII.

CONNIE'S DEPARTURE.

WHEN our friends and acquaintance learnt that Connie was about to follow Ursula's lead, and leave home as a governess, she was assailed with warnings, advice and commiseration from every quarter. She bore the ordeal very well, however; only conjecturing that life would be a terribly hampered and difficult piece of business, if we were bound to guide it according to the conflicting and gratuitous counsel well-meaning people are always ready to give. Immediately Ursula was apprised of the decision to which we had come, she sent Connie a congratulatory letter, ballasted with excellent precepts.

"Make up your mind before you go to hear and see as little as possible of the circumstances of the family, and to *say* nothing; what comes

under your notice inevitably, regard as learnt in confidence and keep it to yourself—I make no exception in favour even of mamma or Dr. Julius. You may meet with annoyances which do not occur in ordinary, well-regulated households, but never allow yourself to expose them. If Mrs. Tom Claridge should weakly offer to share her troubles with you, either evade her folly, or resolve to close your lips on it, for ever and to every one; her miseries are public property, but her secrets are her own.”

The evening before Connie left us, Dr. Julius dined at our house, and, in pursuance of the philosophy of making the best of a bad bargain, and enduring what he could not cure, he condescended to be both particularly and generally agreeable, and the little one and he bade good-night and good-by in perfect love and amity.†

“I am so happy Julius has come round,” said the dear child that night. “I don’t think I *could* have gone to-morrow if he had kept up his grave displeasure. It is not good to act in opposition to one you love, Doris, though you may be sustained by ever so strong an assurance of

right and duty. At one time I am sure it seemed as if a little judicious selfishness would be the truest justice to all concerned—as if it would be better to defy papa, and give in to all Julius urged, than to be steady in resisting him. But I am so glad and thankful now things have been shaken into shape without my taking any step of my own; I know my own heart would have reproached me if I had grieved papa, and though Julius says I am flint, I know he trusts me more than he did—my strength and courage, that is. Shall I tell you what he said?—”

“You may if you like—”

“No, I think I won’t; it would sound conceited.”

“I do not want to hear—I am sure he can make pretty speeches.”

“You are not to quiz, Doris! That is Ursie’s special privilege.”

“Then I am sure he can make hard speeches.”

“They are to be forgotten. Oh, Doris, I am as happy as a queen!”

And she looked so with her bonnie bright

eyes, flushed cheeks, and dewy lips apart, sitting with her hands clasped, and her bosom heaving soft, placid sighs of full content. I watched her, the pretty, pretty picture, smiling to myself; loving her, and praying for her in my heart, as we pray for those who are going away from us into a world where our care cannot follow them. I can see her in my mind's eye still, just as she was then; the lovely, innocent face, pure, simple, open as a little child's; with a soul shining through it, that knew no sin beyond a wilful thought, no suffering that a shower of April tears could not wash away.

And that picture of her remains in my memory always unchanged, glowing, and soft, and beautiful; she left it behind to comfort me, and I kept it sacredly—that was the child, the pet, the little one; the home-darling, beloved beyond all the rest, whom we suffered to go out of the watch of our affections, and so *lost*. She came back to us again, but never the same, never the same! Vain regret returns upon me yet when I remember all the change—the sweet lips had learnt to quiver then in a woman's most

passionate anguish, and the loving eyes to veil themselves in the scalding floods which gush from the deepest and bitterest springs of mortal life.

But I will tell my tale straightforward — “nothing extenuating and setting down naught in malice.”

Connie left us the next morning in cheerful spirits, Mrs. Tom Claridge's pony-phaeton being sent to convey her to her new home; and you may be sure the cottage was still enough and dull enough when she was gone. Talk of curtailing mamma's and papa's pleasures, indeed! Connie was the chief of them, as we soon discovered when she was taken away. It is very pleasant to have some one about the house who is happy and joyous, and abounding in the hopes and anticipations of youth; we cannot share them, perhaps, but we have the reflection of their sunshine, and when we love their possessor, we are warmed by it to our heart's core.

Papa missed her twenty times a day. When he went down to Scarcliffe in his bath-chair, he had not the cheerful variety of her company

to exchange against mine; when he was obliged to stay at home, he had no one to read aloud the long "fluffy" parliamentary debates, through which she used to wade with an ardent perseverance, which inferred a certain amount of satisfaction in the exercise of her sound young lungs; mamma could not see the newspaper type for more than a few minutes at a time, and papa soon detected my weariness in the dropping of my voice, and the flagging of my attention. But she was lost to us, and like many less precious things, her value in her absence came to be fully appreciated.

The hope that we might see her about once a week turned out a delusion; she never came, but we heard from her frequently, and her letters were always cheerful and consolatory; she liked the little children, who were perfectly tractable and docile, and though their poor mother was restless, nervous and fidgety, she was kind and considerate to her. Dr. Julius had his letters too, on which we used to compare notes, and feel tolerably satisfied with the result; and so a month slipped quietly by, and Midsummer was upon us.

During the last week in June, Dr. Julius departed on his foreign tour, after a farewell peep at Connie, on which he reported nothing but what was perfectly satisfactory ; and the next event to anticipate, was Ursula's coming home for her holidays, which were for some reason deferred until nearly the end of July. She was mistress of all our news before she arrived, and was pleased with everything but Dr. Julius's having gone abroad. She hoped he was not tiring of his game at patience, but she could not help fancying that if he were still as hot and fond as formerly, he would have preferred staying at home within reach of his lady-love, to removing himself a thousand miles away. But she did not pretend to understand the fantastical ways of love and lovers, and possibly it might be with them as the song said,—“Absence makes the heart grow fonder,” but she was quite sure it would never be so with her—if she liked people she could not have too much of them.

Respecting herself and her affairs, she had nothing to communicate which was not in the

highest degree satisfactory and flattering. The riotous little people whom she had undertaken to train, had become all that was obedient, punctual, clever, proper and delightful; they were the best children in the world, they loved her enthusiastically, and they had given her for a parting present, a copy of Tennyson's poems, bound in morocco by Hayday. The dignified nurse was conciliated, and she had got an old willow chair stuffed and chintz-covered, which was as easy and luxurious as possible, only it creaked when she sat down, and had a failure in its spine, which made leaning back in it a rather anxious position. After what we had seen at Erlstone Castle with our own eyes, and after all the stories of governesses, injured and oppressed, that we had heard, it was a real pleasure to look at, and listen to Ursula. She was more genial and accommodating than I had ever known her before; and when patronizing little Mrs. Peacocke would have condoled with her on the painful position a governess must feel herself in, as standing on the debateable ground where she was not treated as *quite* a lady, and

yet must not associate with menial servants, she put her down with a laughing assurance, that if she were governess at Erlstone Castle, she would find herself in possession of a luxury of space and attendance far greater than any middleclass household in Redcross aspired to. Ursie's bravado and flourish fell dead on me, but Mrs. Peacocke was respectfully impressed; and delighting to talk about great people, she tried to draw her into a gossip, and was partially successful; for respecting the confidence of private life, Ursula could preach much better than she could practise.

She had been at home about a week when one morning Connie's letter, due that day according to her hitherto unintermitted custom, failed to come to hand; and as the weather was cool and fine, she proposed to walk over to Mrs. Tom Claridge's house at Combe, and see her, and bring us word how she was, and why she had not written as usual. We were not anxious, for we had no reason to expect any change; but Ursula's tidings threw us all into the deepest vexation and dismay. She had found the cottage

shut up and empty, and on inquiring at the park lodge of Sir William Claridge's place, she had been informed that both families had set off to Brighton the day before. It was a sudden movement recommended by Lady Claridge's London physician, and the woman did not think anybody knew of it until the day they left; it was expected that they would stop away through the winter. After all our anxiety to keep Connie near us, this was truly annoying, and twenty suggestions were offered to bring her back, and set aside, which ended in our agreeing to wait until we heard from her.

This we did the next day; she had written in pencil in the railway-carriage, and what she said bore out the lodge-keepers' information. Brighton in the autumn was recommended to Lady Claridge, and she had been moved at once, lest she should become too weak to make the journey. Sir William's pledge to his son obliged him to take his daughter-in-law and grand-children with him, and they were all lodging for the present in the same house—this in a postscript accompanying the address.

Connie said not a word of her own sentiments, of regret or surprise, and seemed to have acquiesced in the transportation, as an unavoidable contingency of her situation. We had not calculated on such a measure for a moment, but since it was accomplished, Ursula serenely said we had nothing for it but to acquiesce too.

XIX.

A FRIEND.

DURING the spring that was past, Mr. Westmore had succeeded in bringing out one volume of his *Historic Studies*, which had met with so fair a reception from the press and the public that he had every encouragement to prepare a second. He had one day brought me a batch of reviews to read; we had talked over the new series of *Studies*, and he was gone again, when my sister Ursula peered into the drawing-room, and said half crossly and half in fun,—

“If anybody were to come courting to me, we should have to betake ourselves to the pantry, as the only clear stage in the house. So Mr. Westmore has been having another of his long proses with you—were you by yourselves all the time?”

"Yes," replied I, surprised both at the substance and manner of the question. "Papa has been dozing in the dining-room ever since dinner, and I do not think mamma has stirred either."

"What in the world can you find to say to each other?" inquired she, with irrepressible curiosity.

"Oh, I think we talk chiefly of his Historic Studies—those that are finished, and those that are planned."

"Very delightful indeed! Men always like to talk about themselves and their doings, clever men especially, but they won't put up with it from each other; an intelligent, sympathetic, soft woman is a better listener, and I daresay you sit as quiet as a mouse, and encourage him by wearing an air of profound interest?"

"I am *really* interested—it is no air at all," said I. "He is always easy and conversable with me, and I like it."

"So I perceive. Well, a word to the wise—don't set Redcross gossiping, that is all."

I felt very indignant, and asked Ursie how she

could make such mischievous insinuations—might we not be friends? I said.

“I am a very material person,” returned she, “and I don’t believe in friendship between men and women, especially in friendship built on a foundation of pity and admiration; and I rather suspect that if you were to hear of Mr. Westmore’s devoting an hour twice or thrice a week to quiet chats with any other young woman, you would be very curious to learn what were her claims to his regard and her powers of attraction.”

I was too angry and too much taken by surprise as well to make a proper answer to this speech, so I held my peace; but it was a long while since I had heard anything that had so deeply annoyed and wounded me. Ursula was sharp-sighted enough to see that she had me at an advantage, and malicious enough to go on with her remarks, as if she enjoyed my discomfiture.

“You may look vexed, but it is true what I say,” she continued, with an emphatic gesture of her head. “Every one who knows you is sensible of an improvement; your unnatural gravity and reserve are gone, and you have

recovered almost all your old gaiety of temper and expansiveness of affection. You cannot make a virtue of mourning Philip Massey any longer—a woman of three-and-twenty is not *quite* as ancient as Methuselah, and you are very young at heart still, deny it as vehemently as you choose. Mind, I don't say I anticipate anything absurd, though nothing would ever surprise me in the way of sacrifice from you; but it is as safe to be on your guard. Mr. Westmore is the sort of man who must have a kind woman to help him along with her quiet appreciation; and I do believe, if his mother were gone, he would be so truly wretched that you would crave nothing more than to take her place, and be his faithful servant, slave and copying-clerk to the end of your miserable days. If you don't mean to accept the Christian office, should he ask you to do so, it is high time to discourage his lengthy visits. They have been observed, for Mrs. Peacocke asked me this afternoon if I had resumed my Latin lessons. It is only right to tell you what construction may be put upon them."

And having said her say, Ursula left me to

the enjoyment of my reflections, which were so uncomfortable and vexatious that I thought nothing would puff them away but a walk up the down. Just when I had found a source of interest and happiness to have it stirred up and disturbed and sullied by such impertinent suggestions!—truly Ursula was a troubler of 'pleasant waters; but I would be still, and soon they would settle back into calm and clearness, and glass as brightly as ever the renewed sunshine that filled these few days of my life.

Before leaving the house I sought and found my copy of the *Historic Studies* which I had promised to lend to Miss Layel, designing to leave it at her cottage as I passed; but as I went up the garden, I saw the sisters through the open window with the tea-table between them, and the white lion standing up on a chair, with his fore paws on the cloth, lapping milk out of a china cup. Miss Jenny espied me, and insisted on my going in, and when she learnt that I had not had my tea, she divested me of my bonnet and shawl with a promptitude peculiarly her own, and made me stay and drink it with them.

When I produced the book, Miss Kitty held out her hand for it, and I remember thinking she betrayed a curiously excited interest in it; for as she turned over the leaves, they rustled in her quivering fingers, and her colour came and went until, at last, she leant back on the couch pale as death. Miss Jenny looked at her, but did not speak, and then she said,—

“Never mind me, Jenny; it will be over in a moment,” and being left quite to herself for a little while and unobserved, she recovered, and joined in our conversation. I sought no explanation of the circumstance then, and forgot it very soon; but I learnt its significance afterwards, and then I wondered that my suspicions had not been awakened earlier. An enigma is always ridiculously easy when you have its solution, as everybody knows, but how the accumulation of small proofs escaped me so long as it did would be very hard to say.

Of course, my mind was full at the moment of Ursula’s oppressive wisdom; and as we were glancing conversationally from one topic to another, I asked Miss Layel, as a sentimental writer,

what she thought on the moot point of friendship between men and women. She did not answer me immediately, being busy mixing cream, sugar and a suspicion of hot water to take the chill off for that much-indulged little white lion, and smiling to herself, as I fancied, at his impatience to get at the treat before it was ready; or she might be laughing at *me*—I am by no means sure that she was not—for when Tricksey had plunged his dainty mou into the saucer, she looked up merrily, and said,—

“I dare not recommend it until you are as old as I am, and your hair begins to turn grey. Then if you find the opportunity—which is rare—you may indulge in it harmlessly enough.”

I represented that I was already quite of a *good age*—meaning elderly almost.

“Oh, yes, of an excellent age!” replied she; “but regarded as an age for the cultivation of the friendship you refer to, it will improve with every year that is added to it.”

“My dear, you seem quite a girl to us,” added Miss Kitty, who had listened without taking any

part in the debate; "I have no doubt you feel yourself perfectly safe, but it will be wise to remember that while you are serene and exalted, you may accidentally lead another into temptation. If you had known each other from childhood, and had been brought up on brotherly and sisterly terms, it would be only right and natural; but I believe experience is against you on every other view of the question."

There was no name mentioned, but I was sure the sisters knew whom I had in my mind when I introduced the subject, and that if they had spoken all they thought, they would have told me I was making an experiment on ground by common consent marked dangerous. I have known other persons since who were of the same opinion; but I had probably sought their views without much intention of being influenced by them.

Not to provoke any more of Ursula's sage remarks on our intimacy, however, I avoided Mr. Westmore the next time he came to our house, and before he called again she had returned to Erlstone Castle; but to avoid him, I discovered,

was to deny myself a pleasure; and having certified to my conscience, after a rigid self-examination, that there was no wrong in our friendship, and no danger to either, I determined to enjoy it openly and frankly, as a thing of which I had far more cause to be proud than ashamed; which determination restored me to great calm and comfort of mind.

I had spent my gold of love long before, but I was still rich in the pure, refined silver of friendship, and if I found my coin of exchangeable value, and could trade on it without loss, why should I not? And as for Mr. Westmore's being beguiled into any folly for *me*, any one experienced who had seen us together would soon have dismissed that absurd idea. He always talked with his eyes on the fire or the carpet, and liked to have a sprig in his fingers to twirl; and sometimes, he so far forgot that he was speaking to an unlearned woman as to concentrate the pith of his discourse in a Latin or Greek quotation, which I did not understand, and which he never stopped to translate, but for which I always somehow felt the wiser. There was a mental tonic in his talk

which had as strengthening an effect on my mind as an hour's reading of Johnson; it was sorrowfully worldly-wise without bitterness, speculative and yet religious, calm but never tedious, learned but never dull. Contact with large minds must always improve and influence the tone of our own, though we may be very far from seeing clearly to the limits of their expansiveness; and amongst the satisfactions I found in Mr. Westmore's society, it was certainly not the least to be lifted above the petty cares and considerations of every-day life; and shown from the elevation of Christian philosophy how small and unworthy they are of all the fret we bestow upon them, when compared with the things eternal amongst which they are strewn, like a sordid sprinkling of ashes that our passing breath will puff away into obliviousness.

This August died my uncle Sibthorpe, my own mother's only brother, whom it may be remembered I had affronted by my refusal to become his housekeeper at the time of my father's ruin and Philip Massey's death. I was his only blood relation, but, as I have said elsewhere, he left

the great bulk of his fortune to found a hospital for the reception of the incurable sick; he made a few bequests in his will besides, and to me, as a sign of relenting, which was not altogether forgiveness, he gave his household furniture, books, and pictures. I caused them to be at once converted into money, as of no use to me in their original shape, and my uncle's lawyer sent me down a cargo of old family and friendly correspondence, which had been routed out of desks and drawers before the sale. From what I read, my relative must have been a great hoarder of sentimental rubbish—a trait in which perhaps I resemble him—but the only papers I found of any interest to this story were three letters addressed to him in his adversity by Mr. Paul Westmore, the elder.

In the first I opened the writer pleaded Mr. Sibthorpe's long intimacy with his principles and character as a defence against the dreadful charge which hung over him. Its tone was at once indignant and humble—indignant because of the cruel wrong; humble, if possible to avert its consequences. In some passages it was almost

incoherent through the tumult that distracted the writer's mind. He spoke of a wife heart-broken, of children dishonoured, of prospects ruined, and as-severated his innocence with the deepest solemnity. The other two letters were written on the same day—the day apparently before his trial—and were both painfully, pitifully urgent, but fierce too in their expression of insupportable anguish. As I read, a conviction of this unfortunate man's innocence was borne in upon my mind irresistibly—no ridicule and no array of asserted facts has ever been able to dislodge it since.

The day after my discovery of these letters, I carried them to the Down Cottage, and committed them to Mrs. Westmore's hands. I found her alone, and she received them with a tearful exclamation of surprise, and read them at once, while the white passivity of her face was all broken up and quivering with emotion; my heart ached at the piteous sight of her distress.

When she had gone through them, it seemed an easement to her to speak of the trouble she had endured.

“They bring back that time so vividly—almost

I am living it over again!" she said. "You have seen these letters, and can understand in some degree the simple rectitude, the instinctive honour, the nobleness of my husband's character, the lovingness of his disposition. The accusation against him seemed to me as impious as if they had accused a saint of God! I revered him; never for a moment did the disgrace hide him from me. He was great—he was himself through it all! but, oh, what it must have been for him to bear! Every night, upon my knees, I thank our Father in Heaven that he is dead, and has done with suffering and injustice."

And then her voice broke into one of those wild agonies of weeping, such as, perhaps, washed with their vain waves the pitiless rock of trial on which her life and her children's had gone to wreck so long ago. I spoke to her such words of soothing and comfort as I was able, thinking to myself, if they who are supported by faith in the victim's innocence suffer thus terribly, what must be the despair of the unfortunates connected with those criminals whom justice righteously pronounces guilty every day.

Presently she went on with her mournful reminiscences,—

“I never knew a man who won a deeper personal regard from his friends—yet many of them forsook him. He would not so have forsaken one he had loved, fallen under the shadow of a false and shameful accusation. Paul was like his father in temper and disposition, but he is changed! Ah, it was a dreadful uprooting to him! It tore from him everything—friends, hope, ambition, study, love, everything! He had to give up a most dear girl—he is still enough now, but he has never forgotten her—poor Kitty! it was not her fault—*she* would have been faithful to the death! He is growing old beyond his years, and says he wants nothing but his poor mother, his quiet fireside, his books and his daily bread; yet what he might have been! But I must bow to it; it is the will of God that all my pride and hope in him should come to nothing.”

“Have patience yet,” said I. “While there is life there is work, and in all work there is a germ of hope strong enough to rebuild the ruined air-

castles of youth; I believe and trust he will have his due and come to honour still."

"I have no faith; sometimes I depress when I would encourage him," she replied; "but you do him good. Where have you learnt so early the wisdom of not striving to alter the inalterable, and the justice of regarding an individual clear of his mean surroundings and despicable misfortunes? You must not forsake us. I never thought to see Paul take heart again as he has lately done; but it is *you* I thank; you have roused him, spurred him—yes, you have done him good."

She said that—she said I had *done him good*. I knew it before, but I liked to hear it put into words, because then I seemed not to stand on my own will only, in resolving to maintain our friendship. Ursula might be very sagacious and Miss Layel and her sister very wise, but it was clear they did not understand this peculiar case, and, therefore, could not be justified in pronouncing an opinion on it. For once I must be guided by my own sentiments, and rely entirely on my own judgment; and if foolish people chose to make

a gossip about nothing,—well, I hoped I should have sense enough to turn a deaf ear, and leave them to their diversion; sure that if I were not the victim of their idle talk, somebody else, perhaps more vulnerable, would have the place.

It is a truly comfortable state of being when you have successfully reasoned yourself into a belief that it is good and right to have your own way. There is an aftertaste of poison in enjoyments against the conscience, but she rebukes mildly an error founded on a good intention and built up according to the best light we have. In such an architectural folly some of my friends have since told me I was now engaged, but they never convinced me, and they never will.

XX.

THE CLOUD DARKENS.

WHEN Dr. Julius Eden returned from his long holiday tour in Spain towards the end of September, he stopped a couple of days in town for the purpose of running down to Brighton to see Connie. He wrote to papa from London, mentioning his intentions, but when he came up to the cottage the day after his arrival at Scarcliffe, to our great disappointment he had no news to give. The Brighton lodgings had been vacated on the previous morning, and Sir William Claridge and all his family had crossed over to the Isle of Wight; that mild climate having been now recommended for Lady Claridge in preference to one more bracing. Thither, however, Dr. Julius had not time to follow them, and he came home far from satisfied that Connie

should be removed beyond our reach and supervision.

Their engagement had now subsisted for nearly a year, and we had grown accustomed to the little one's absence, if not reconciled to it; indeed, *that* some of us could never be. Dr. Julius knew that on this point he had a firm ally in me, and we now talked over together the feasibility of bringing her back amongst us at Christmas to remain, but found no encouragement to put our design in execution. Her letters of this period were sufficiently cheerful; she gave us many pleasant little sketches of where she went and what she saw; but, in obedience to Ursula's admonition, there was never a line that could be construed into family gossip. In many of these documents the names of the people amongst whom she lived did not occur at all, and to Dr. Julius she was not more communicative. We, therefore, supposed that she had nothing of which to complain, and that her buoyant temper kept her always cheerful and happy.

To me the chief consolation when I felt disquieted about her was, that Christmas *must* come,

and that then she would return to us for, at least, a month of holiday. But Christmas arrived, and with it the disappointing tidings that no Connie could be spared to us; and the cause of her detention was such as we could not in reason or kindness oppose. Mrs. Tom Claridge had been taken seriously ill, and while she was laid up, and Lady Claridge still a confirmed invalid, Connie wrote that she could not find it in her heart to leave the little children; neither could we find it in our hearts to urge her to such a step, much as her prolonged absence grieved us all. When the poor lady recovered sufficiently to bear the removal, she was carried to London to be under superior medical advice; but this was not until the middle of January; and Connie then wrote again to tell us that, though she could not leave just yet, all the family would probably return to Combe about Easter, when she had a promise of a long holiday.

Her letters from town were not unamusing. As Mrs. Tom Claridge rallied from her sickness, which she appeared to do very quickly, she took Connie about with her to concerts, picture-gal-

leries, and exhibitions ; but what seemed to have gratified the little one most of all was a visit that they had paid together to the ladies' gallery of the House of Commons. Her account of it was contained in a letter to papa, in which she gave him a lively personal description of some of the gentlemen with whose eloquence she was already familiar in the columns of *The Times*.

"Dear papa," wrote she—and we all fancied we could hear her blithe voice speaking—"Dear papa, I have been to hear the debates at the House of Commons, and may I confide to you that, at first sight, the collective wisdom of the nation is not an imposing assemblage? We ought never to be allowed to look down on famous men, for it is the worst possible point of view from which they can be regarded. I could not help thinking what a comfort a cigar would have been to some of them who had nothing to do and nothing to say, and, at the moment, nothing particular to listen to. (I am sure if Ursula and the women's-rights-women ever succeed in establishing a feminine parliament, it will have to be a privilege of the House that the members

shall carry their knitting with them, or they will never get through the hours they have to sit with the decorum befitting a body of sages.) I was under a great disadvantage from not knowing who was who, and also from the queer foreshortening of the figures immediately below the gallery. The top of the head and the tip of the nose was all I could see of several gentlemen, and of some whose brows are prominent, the crown only was visible. But by and by the scene became brisker, and as they turned about, I recognized some of the members from Mr. Punch's portraits ; and others afterwards by what they said. (I am afraid my letter will be even more parenthetical than usual, papa, but here I want to tell you that the reporters don't improve the speeches nearly so much as you imagine. I read in *The Times* the next day those I had heard, and found them printed precisely as they had been delivered.) When we had been in the gallery about half an hour, a fine-looking gentleman with a brown beard rose, and immediately the House became attentive. (Will you depute Doris to tell Miss Pegge Burnell that if she had

been up there with us, she would have been obliged to come round to our opinion that beards have an immense advantage over smooth faces? Perched aloft in this eyrie, where we can distinguish little beyond the general character of the head and countenance, the gain in manliness of appearance is quite obvious to all unprejudiced persons.) This gentleman touched on various subjects—Persia, India, and the East generally, and wound up with a question on an affair nearer home; a question about a bill that had been thrown out by the Lords, and how its rejection had affected the feelings of his honourable friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This question was replied to by a gentleman on the ministerial bench, of whose face from my corner I could not catch a glimpse, though I pressed my own as close as possible to the brass trellice-work with which we are caged in. But I found him out before he had uttered six of his harmonious sentences: his voice is clear and even, and he spoke as calmly as if he were answering a question about the weather; yet at the time his fingers were working in and out of

an india-rubber ring, which he had slipped upon his hand as if there was excitement somewhere that must have vent. If I might use what you always disallow—only one word, papa—I should say he *chaffed* the brown-beard a little, and twice he elicited a hearty laugh, though I don't think he spoke more than five minutes. As soon as he sat down, a broad, sledge-hammer-looking man below the gangway got up and followed on the same subject; he was very vehement and eloquent indeed, and when he had said his say, he swung ponderously out of the House, without stopping to hear a little gentleman with a large bald head make a long and interesting oration about Italy. After him rose a crisp, trim personage, who was so prodigal of quotations in unknown tongues that I have no idea what he was talking about, and the greater part of his fellow-members were so obtrusively inattentive that I imagine they did not understand him either. When that was over—but it lasted half an hour—a gentleman got up, and asked a fierce question in a fiercely nervous way about the defences of the kingdom, and made a statement which was

noisily interrupted. I don't know how he was answered, or whether he was answered at all or not; for, first, one member spoke a few words, and then another, and some cried, "No, no;" and some laughed, and there was Babel for a few minutes, which must have been rather agreeable, as giving the silent gentlemen an opportunity of opening their mouths; when peace was restored, some one, whom from my place I could not see, began to *prose*, and forthwith the benches, which had been nearly full before, became suddenly empty; while the ladies who were in the gallery chattered, and rustled their silks, and made such a buzz that I should not have been surprised if somebody had called out from below, entreating them to be quiet. As we could not hear a word, and this speech seemed as if it might flow on monotonously till morning, I was rather thankful when Mrs. Tom Claridge proposed that we should leave. But I shall always be glad I went; it will give so much more interest to the fluffy debates, which I shall soon be at home to read to you again, when I can picture to myself the men speaking, and fancy

all their surroundings. The gentleman of the sprig was not present, but on the lowest bench of the Opposition side there was an impassive figure of a man who never moved or spoke so long as we stayed; he kept his arms folded and his eyes on the floor, and might have been conspiring in the clouds for any change of expression on his pale, clear-featured face: him I could distinctly see, and he is the most distinct presence in the House, viewed from the ladies' cage. I have not told you any of the names—no one told them to me; Mrs. Tom Claridge pointed out the mace on the Speaker's table, but that was all; so I had to guess who they were, and the next day from *The Times* I found I had guessed the chiefs right, and therefore I shall leave you to guess them too."

On reading this, mamma remarked,—

"I like the little one to give us descriptions of what she sees and hears, but I wish she would also tell us more about herself;" so when we wrote again, we intimated that a few personal details would be highly acceptable.

This is what came in answer to the hint.

“You want news of myself, dear mamma, when news of myself I have none. My heart aches to-day for a sight of you all, but I shall have to be patient yet. I am quite well. I teach the children regularly, and walk with them twice a day in the Square garden for an hour, and in the early evening I play with them, or sew or read a little; and what do I more? Oh! I always watch the man lighting the gas-lamps, and when he has lit the last and disappeared round the corner, that is a signal for me to go down to the drawing-room, where I often have to play and sing, or pretend to do fancy-work until bedtime, if anybody is at home; and if not, I stay in my schoolroom, which I greatly prefer. A few days ago, as we were crossing the road to the Square garden, I saw a little man whom I thought I knew; we looked at each other, and then he came skipping forward quite brisk and cordial, and behold it was the Fortuner! The Fortuner! but so much altered and improved! I think he must have been drilled, for he carries his head straight now, and has done away with the moustache, the chin-tuft, and the wig; for

when he lifted his hat, I saw that he was bald and that he looked just like any other respectable old gentleman. Mamma, do you think there is anything becoming in a barrister's wig? I was taken to Lincoln's Inn to see the Lord Chancellor sitting in his court a few days ago; the first time I ever saw a wig of that kind anywhere but on a block in a barber's shop. It must originally have been designed as improving to the countenance, and it either has an excellent effect, or else these clever faces taken in groups are better than we generally see. Not a retreating chin amongst them, mamma; but perhaps a man with a retreating chin would never get to be a Chancery barrister. I stood a minute or two to listen to a dreadful rigmarole about a cargo of iron, which was not dull *for once*, and then there was room for me at the end of a bench up a step, and I sat down and really grew quite interested in the doubles and twists of that learned tongue, until I suddenly became aware that mine was the only bonnet in a pit of wigs; and the discovery made me so hot that I thought I would rather not stay any longer, and we came

away, but not before I was fully convinced that law is not the short cut to truth. Oh! mamma darling, I do wish Easter were here! It is not one year since I left you, and it feels like a hundred. I would never live in London by my choice: it is so dull and cheerless, and I believe it is the thick air that prevents my sleeping. I know I lie awake half the night often thinking of you all, and wishing I were amongst you again. I would rather inhabit the tiniest hutch at Red-cross than the grandest palace in this wilderness of stone. Have I ever told you about the old Scotch nurse these children have? She is a dear old soul, and quite a comfort to me. At first I thought her a surly and suspicious person, but she is very good to me now—the best friend I have here, I think; she is rough and crinkled outside like a Roseberry pippin, but within she is sweet and sound to the core. Does this letter talk enough about myself, mamma dear? I hope it does, for my candle is nearly burnt out, and if I write any more I shall have to undress in the dark; so with best love I must wish you good-night.”

All Connie's letters from the time she left us I had preserved, and I remember this one saddened us for several days. Try to hide it as she would, it was very evident that home-sickness was her companion often. Dr. Julius read it twice over with growing uneasiness.

"Why can she not sleep for thinking of you at home?" said he; "she knows you are well, and need have no anxiety for you; she must, therefore, have anxiety for herself. It is most unlucky that my uncle should be laid up with his gout just now, and incapable of attending to his patients; but as soon as he is able to go about again, I shall certainly run off to town and satisfy myself whether she is as comfortable as she ought to be. Write to her, Doris; I shall write too, and insist on her being more explicit. By the by, who is her escort to these public places where she makes her observations on barristers' wigs?"

We did not know: we supposed it could only be old Sir William Claridge, who, she always said, was very kind to her whenever she mentioned him. Dr. Julius did not appear fully

satisfied by our suggestion, and would clearly have preferred an assurance that Connie was immured perpetually in her schoolroom; though it pleased the rest of us to hear that she had now and then a little amusement and variety, as more healthy at her age than prolonged seclusion. We each wrote our letters, however, and in mine were formal questions, to which I begged her to give precise answers without reserve and without delay.

But, as if to prolong my anxiety, the morning after I posted it there came an urgent message from aunt Maria, entreating that I would go to her immediately; poor Sofona was dangerously ill, and her old servant, Nancy, had broken a leg! In this accumulation of distresses she had no one to help or support her but a rough and ignorant country girl; if papa was not ailing just then, could I be spared? Mamma said "Yes;" and, as it was not a case for hesitation or delay, I packed my wallet forthwith, and in less than two hours after receiving the letter I had started on my journey.

I reached Aberford the same evening, just at

the edge of dusk, and found aunt Maria and her household in a lamentable condition indeed ; but the doctor who was attending Sofona and old Nancy, the next day brought over from Sandford a professional nurse, who, though she could not lighten sorrow, could effectually lighten its concomitant labour. I found, in fact, little to do beyond keeping watch by Sofona, now quiet enough, poor soul, and my office admitted of the full indulgence of all my own thoughts and fears.

The day but one after my arrival at Aberford, a letter was forwarded to me from home ; not from Connie, as I expected, but from Ursula ; and what I read in it filled my mind with a new disquietude.

“Have you heard yet that there is another patched-up reconciliation between Mr. Tom Claridge and his poor little wife ?” she wrote. “Of course, all right-feeling persons would be glad to know that they had made peace, but Connie is beginning to vow and declare that she shall leave. Such a frantic crotchet ! You have more influence with her than anybody, so I advise you to write and warn her at once against committing

so conspicuous an absurdity. Her position may be less pleasant than heretofore; she will have to live more in her schoolroom, and to expect less of Mrs. Tom Claridge's society, but then in that respect she will be no worse off than myself. To talk of resigning her situation because Mr. Tom Claridge has reassumed his place in his own family is such utter foolishness that I really wonder how she conceived the design. It would raise a storm of inquiries about our ears that would never be laid, by the ridiculous statement that she could not endure him. She would be mercilessly quizzed: it would be like running out of his way for fear he should fall in love with *her*! She will just have to exercise a little proper discretion, that is all. Mr. Tom Claridge has a familiar way with him, and makes rough jokes, and his wife is a sickly, nervous body, jealous of every woman on whom he casts his eyes, but Connie need know nothing of these private domesticities; they will not come in her road unless she step aside to meet them."

. And then Ursula branched off to indifferent topics.

I showed the letter to aunt Maria, and told her the character the gentleman bore in our neighbourhood; but she, dear, good soul, thought it such a matter of pious thankfulness that a divided house should be made at one with itself, and the husband and wife reunited, that she could see nothing but overscrupulousness in Connie's longing to escape from the lot laid upon her.

"We cannot expect everything in this world to fall out just as we wish," said she. "Tell the little one, with aunt Maria's love, that she must take the bitter and the sweet, the rough and the smooth, as they come from the hand of God, without restiveness and without complaint."

I wished I had had Dr. Julius there to consult, but in his absence I could only write to Connie again that day, without waiting to hear from her; but I ventured to add to aunt Maria's message a few qualifications of my own.

She replied to both my letters immediately on receiving the second, and seemed to have laid to heart all I said, but she was still less open than I could have desired. Neither then nor afterwards did she ever expatiate on the secrets

of that unhappy household; she merely substantiated Ursula's news as to the reconciliation; said she had received a long epistle of well-meant but useless advice from her, and begging me not to be uneasy, intimated that they should all come down to Combe at Easter, unless Mrs. Tom Claridge changed her mind again. She said nothing of leaving, and I, therefore, concluded that Ursula's statement about the *vowing* and *declaring* was mainly an exaggeration, as so many of Ursula's statements were.

It wanted about a month to Easter and a month was not long to wait, but yet I could not be satisfied; I could perceive that Connie reserved matters that affected herself—they might affect other persons also, but she was our nearest and dearest, and it might be very far from well that Ursula's veto on her confidence should be respected literally. I wrote to her again even more urgently than before, and in the due course of post I received her answer. She had not indited it in the best of spirits, as I could judge from its general tone rather than from any express complaint. She did admit that she was less comfortable than

at first. Poor Mrs. Tom Claridge was more uneven in temper, more uncertain and difficult to please than formerly, and she was afraid she must have vexed her in some way without intending it. One day she was kind and caressing, the next she was silent or peevish; she had invited Connie to accompany her husband and herself to the theatre, and then she had thought it needful to bid her not anticipate a repetition of the indulgence: she had sent her out, against her own will, under Mr. Tom Claridge's charge to see certain lions of London, and then pettishly told her to remember that she was engaged to teach the children and not to be a companion to their papa. "Since which admonition," Connie concluded, "I have refused to go anywhere except in attendance on the little girls."

This letter closed abruptly with a promise of another soon, which promise was redeemed before the week expired.

In the letter I then received Connie told me regretfully that she had had a few words with Mrs. Tom Claridge, whose behaviour towards her she called "quite unaccountable." The confession

was not made willingly, I felt; she was urged to it in spite of herself, and good it was that she should be urged to it—I began to think Ursula's counsels about strict reticence might prove, under the peculiar circumstances, the most mischievous advice that could have been given to a girl of Connie's inexperience and youth.

Thus she wrote:—

“I saw that Mrs. Tom Claridge was angry with me, for all through dinner she never spoke once; so afterwards when the children were gone out, I asked her if there was anything she would like different in my management of them; to which she replied,—‘No, you do all you can; they love you more than myself. I don't blame you, but I am the most miserable woman on the face of the earth.’ She often says this kind of thing, but I could not just then help sighing and looking dejected, and I told her I wished to leave (which I think *now* was unkind while she was so distressed), and she suddenly burst into tears and besought me not to go; she seemed afraid, and said that if I did she should be forsaken of all the world! I am full of pity for her, but my

own position is most difficult, and if I could leave at Easter, quietly and without annoying any one, I should be *so* thankful; but Ursula is peremptory about my staying until my year is out, and I hardly know what to do. You intimate that I ought to have mentioned the reconciliation earlier—perhaps I ought; Ursula knew, but she ordered me to repeat only what concerned myself, because I could but fret and fidget you all by doing otherwise, unless I were ‘selfishly bent on obtaining a summons to idleness at home,’ and *that* kept me silent. Mr. Tom Claridge was over at Ventnor several times while his wife was in danger, and when we came to London we came to his house. Sir William and Lady Claridge are in Eaton Place. After all is said, things are not so intolerable as you may fancy—Mrs. Tom Claridge is fretful and unreasonable, and her husband is rather fulsome in his civilities, but I stay in my schoolroom out of the way as much as I can; only it is unsettling to live in a house where the skeleton has escaped from the cupboard and marches to and fro indulging in wanton freaks at the expense of everybody’s

comfort. It is the most irregular establishment. Even when we are most serene, I feel as if something were going on out of sight which keeps my nerves continually on the stretch for what may happen next. Last week Mrs. Tom Claridge slept for three nights in Eaton Place, and I never knew it until she told me herself. It is my office to make breakfast, but she often is not down; then at our early dinner, she is as frequently as not absent; and of an evening she goes out constantly; so I had no suspicion she was living out of the house, as she appeared regularly in the schoolroom, dressed for her drive, about two o'clock for a visit to the children, according to custom; the servants must have known and her husband, but no one said a word to me or the little girls. I was vexed when she informed me of it—which she did as if it were a thing that especially concerned me; at the same time, she gave me to understand that a quarrel had led to it, and then I was thankful she stopped short, for I did not want to know any of her secrets. There is something about her that I cannot help loving though she annoys me often. She

has a taunting trick of making remarks on my dress, my looks, and the style in which my hair is done; I have altered the last three times to please her and am now wearing it Chinese fashion, which I think hideous, but I don't mind looking a fright here; I would do anything but cut it off, if she would not be so frivolous and tiresome. I feel I have a friend in old Sir William Claridge; he said to me one day *à propos* of I did not understand what, that they would take care of me, meaning, I suppose, Lady Claridge and himself, and he bade me go to them if I were in any difficulty. But that, of course, I never am. I am fond of the children, and as they are young my work is very light. A principal part of it consists in acting grandmamma to their dolls, and making grandmotherly conversation over the lovely wax babies when they are brought from the other end of the room to pay me solemn visits in imitation of their own to Eaton Place. They are affectionate little girls and are greatly attached to their papa, who is boisterously fond of them and lavish of toys and toy-books. The whole family is a riddle. Perhaps I ought not to have

an opinion, but I think if Mrs. Tom Claridge were less sharp, fretful and suspicious, her husband would use her better than he does. I have never seen a quarrel between them, and I trust I never shall; but I cannot help hearing the snarling speeches they exchange when they meet occasionally at breakfast, and more often than not *she* begins them. Still all my sympathies are with her; for though he is kind to his children, civil to me, and roughly good-humoured to the household generally, I cannot get over the bad impression of his face. The dear old Scotch nurse is to go away—why, I know not—‘Master had given her her discharge,’ she told me. I am sorry, for she was good to the little ones and to me, and she has been with Mrs. Tom Claridge through all her troubles. Perhaps, some of these details that your questions have extorted from me would have been better untold and forgotten—but it is to *you*, dear Doe, my second self, and you must exercise a wise discretion. Don’t give Ursula this letter to read; she would find in it twenty things to carp at. Julius is even more inquiring than you, but I hope I shall have

satisfied him in the letter that goes with yours, though I have not teased him with the small worries Mrs. Tom Claridge's querulousness inflicts on me. Don't be unhappy about me; we are nearly through March, and in April I shall certainly come home. Oh, Doris! I could cry for joy at the thought of it! I am grown so old and dull since I came away that a few months more of this unnatural life would give me wrinkles and grey hairs! I feel lighter at heart for my outpouring, but so, I fear, will not you; but that is what comes of encouraging me to complain. Give my love to aunt Maria and tell her I will try to follow her good counsel though it be ever so hard; but I hope it does not preclude all attempt at delivering myself from a position which grows day by day more painful and oppressive. Doris, do your best for me, darling, that I may not come back after Easter; it is not good for me to be here. I will not tell you the dreadful fears that I have sometimes, but rather than put myself within reach of them again, when I have once escaped, I will defy Ursula to the uttermost, but I want to get away quietly;

dearest, I shall write no more, else I should tell you my thoughts, and that would be foolish. Can you imagine me crying myself to sleep? I do it often now—I cannot help it. Don't say so to any one else. I wish Ursula had not been so insisting about my keeping my own counsel—I wish I had told you of some things earlier, and Julius too. In his last letter he says he has a claim on all my confidence, but I cannot write to him these paltry grievances as I can to you; he says I must tell him my mind, and feelings, and whatever affects me. I am sure when I left you all, he might have turned my heart inside out, and he would have found nothing there but love for himself and perhaps a few silly caprices and vanities to please him and always look pretty for him, which he could hardly have blamed; but I don't feel so simple and ignorant and happy now, since I have lived all these months amongst wickedness and misery and discontent, and I blush with shame when I am alone for wretched doubts and suspicions that I could not tell to anybody. O love! how I wish I had never left you! Perhaps I am only nonsensical—Ursie

says so—I have written some things that I would rather not have written, even to you, but I cannot begin the task again and it must go. You see how hard it is to make an end, but it must be done now or I shall lose this post.”

Over the last page of this letter the tears had fallen—it had been written in nervous haste; the lines were crooked, the words jumbled tremulously together, and that was even more of a confession than the words themselves. It needed no far-sighted wisdom to guess the “dreadful fears,” the wretched doubts and suspicions that made poor Connie blush for shame when she was alone; ignorant of evil as she was, even her innocence could not blind her to the miserable dread, that she was making fresh torture for a jealous wife—*causeless* on both sides, I then believed, and still believe. She must come away—of *that* there could be no two opinions; the sooner the better, and the more quietly the better, before there was opportunity for making her the ground of a new quarrel. I wrote her a few lines, and said so plainly, offering to go up to town myself and fetch

her, if that would make her leaving easier. She wrote back hurriedly—I must *do* nothing, and I must *say* nothing—at Easter she would come. Any interference from home would call for explanation to Mrs. Tom Claridge, which she would rather evade. Only have patience—if I wanted to make trouble, then I might come, but not without. Mr. Tom Claridge treated her with respect, and had never done otherwise; if his wife had conceived a dislike to her, it was for provocations of which she had no knowledge, and she would rather slip away without being enlightened. The Scotch nurse had spoken to her, and said she *must* leave, but without making a stir. I was not to doubt her nerve or her courage—just a fortnight more of silence and waiting, and she would be safe with us again. She did not mean to avow that it was not her intention to return until she had got away—she would much rather nobody knew but nurse.

I could but give in to her entreaties—if she had steered her way discreetly so far, she might steer it to the end best unaided—but if ever

we let her go beyond the tether of home again, until Dr. Julius Eden took her, it should be for some much direr cause, I vowed, than any that Ursula's stupid wisdom had invented to bring about this disastrous crisis, whose results as yet we could not estimate.

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